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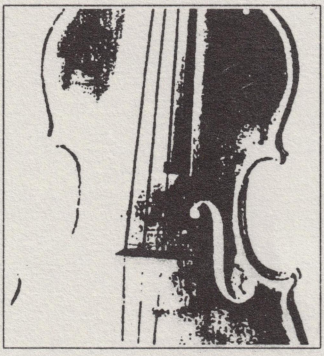

Michel Doneda
Jim Denley
Philipp Wachsmann
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free issue

The Aerial / ¿What Next?

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VOX

Welcome to Issue 17. Improv's 'Live versus CD' debate rumbles on in its customary academic way with the CD as whipping-boy. But a few down-to-earth points need to be made. For the many of us devotees in Britain who don't live in London and for whom getting there often is too expensive, the CD (and MC) format is not a poor substitute for the live experience, it *is* the real thing, virtually the *only* evidence we have that improv exists at all, apart from a small number of small club scenes scattered around the provinces. A major figure in the London improv scene recently told me that he hadn't performed in Birmingham (for non-UK readers, this is the second largest city in England) since the mid-70s! Derisory funding means that improv tours around the UK are rare indeed: rarer still are the visits to these shores of non-UK improvisors. So, the CD is the only evidence we have of the developing work of dozens and dozens of important overseas musicians. Two other related points. The Audience Fallacy: Wonderful recent recordings like Derek Bailey/John Stevens' **Playing** (Incus) and Evan Parker/John Stevens' **Corner To Corner** (Ogun) were recorded under studio conditions, *without an audience present*, specifically for the CD format, specifically for home-listening. You weren't there; you weren't meant to be there, and still you can feel the spontaneity of the musical decision-making. Secondly, CD-improv is never lifeless if we listen actively; its unlimited repeat-performance is vital if we are to attempt to appreciate the incredibly complex beauty of the art of improvisation, which mostly escapes us in the pub room or the concert hall. At gigs we can only get a general impression of an improvisation: CDs allow us to get beneath the skin, to inspect the finer details, and so hopefully bring us closer to the heart of this endlessly fascinating musical activity.

Chris Blackford/December 1994

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editor/publisher/designed and struggled with
Chris Blackford

Rubberneck has commissioned a special piece to honour the inspirational British jazz/improv drummer **John Stevens** who died 13 September 1994. This piece will be published in the next issue of the magazine.

If you find mistakes in this magazine, please remember that they are there for a purpose. We try to publish something for everyone, and some people are always looking for mistakes.

17

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michel doneda
sound chaser

interview & text — **Chris Blackford**
original photography — **Patrick Fabre** (4, 7)
Caroline Forbes (10)

The French have an uncanny habit of keeping their improvisors to themselves. Think of the birth of European free jazz in the 60s, and it's British, Dutch and Germans who spring to most minds, not French musicians. The dearth of information in English language magazines, journals and encyclopedias is indicative of the low profile attributed to French pioneers such as Michel Portal, François Tusques, Bernard Vitet and Vinko Globokar. That the important French recording **1965, François Tusques, Free Jazz** (reissued by In Situ) does not fire the historical imagination like Peter Brötzmann Octet's **Machine Gun** (1968) or Spontaneous Music Ensemble's **Karyobin** (1968) has less to do with the quality of its musical content, than the fact that it is seldom discussed outside France.

Happily, in recent years, clarinettist Louis Sclavis, who founded the influential Lyon-based experimental collective *Association a la Recherche d'un Folklore Imaginaire* (ARFI) with Portal and others in 1976, has done much to raise the profile of French contemporary jazz; bassist Joëlle Léandre and trombonist Yves Robert, who performed at Company Week 1991 (see **Rubberneck 9**), are two other improvisors who have also attracted international attention. Those wishing to experience the high quality of the current French improv scene would do well to track down Un Drame Musical Instantané's **Urgent Meeting** (No Man's Land, 1991) which features some of the aforementioned musicians.

All this, then, by way of a tangential introduction to Michel Doneda (born 1954), another talented but under-recognised French improvisor, who regards himself as "basically a sound-man, open to most musical circumstances", though not part of any French free jazz tradition or a member of ARFI, he is keen to point out. Which means that you're even less likely to have heard of him. I hadn't until two years ago when I heard his powerful duet with Elvin Jones on the Bechet compilation **Vol Pour Sidney (aller)**. Since then I've immersed myself in a good deal of his recorded output and discovered a highly individual soprano saxophonist who's gradually developing an international reputation in improvised music.

But at 14 it was the alto sax that first took his fancy. "I was fascinated by the sound of the air vibrating inside the horn. Even today it's the same fascination, the same adventure for me. Nowadays when I'm playing the soprano I still hear the sound of the alto and also the flute and oboe. So, in a sense I have these three instruments in my soprano."

I like to play outside in the open air. Contact with the sounds of everyday life has always been more important to me than listening to records...

Two years later he was on the road for the first time. "I started up a little anarchic dance band. We travelled around the French countryside. In fact I was more interested in the people we met and the travelling itself than the music we played. When I was 21 I stopped this kind of work because I didn't want my memory to be cluttered with too many melodies or words from songs. I need to be absolutely vacant," he says, rather mysteriously. "I have to be able to hear the sounds inside me and the sounds outside. I like to play outside in the open air. Contact with the sounds of everyday life has always been more important to me than listening to records, but, of course, I enjoyed listening to the music of Paul Desmond, John Coltrane, Jimi Hendrix, the Chicago blues, Derek Bailey and Soft Machine."

Terra (nato, 1985), his first recording, was made at 31. Not surprisingly his soprano sounds assured, authoritative. The folk influences that will infuse later projects with that special, frenzied quality are already apparent here. 'Le passeur d'etoiles' with vocalist Benat Achiary and the experienced violinist Phil Wachsmann, attains a delicate balance between folk and sparse atonality. Wachsmann's twittering glissandi and airy bowing hover above Doneda's subdued flute-like soprano. Renaissance textures surface on 'Vert et jauné': Doneda, Wachsmann and percussionist Gérard Siracusa breaking open the courtly soundworld of crumhorns, sackbuts and viols with the unpredictable energy of improv. The solo 'Xorri Fourmy'

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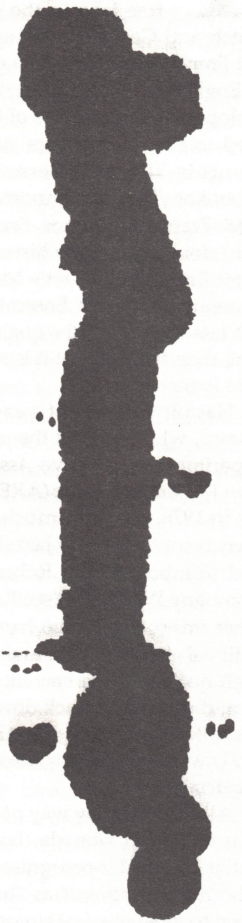

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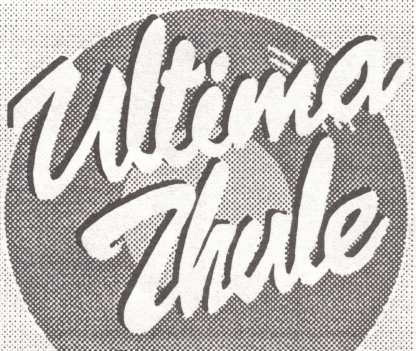
Doneda — Achiary

displays the saxophonist's imaginative control of multiphonic layering and shifting ostinati via circular breathing techniques.

"Daunik Lazro, Lê Quan Ninh and myself started working together in Poland," Michel explains, "where we stayed for a month playing in villages with a touring French theatre group. After that we went on to South America. Daunik and me had been close friends for some time before that, and to develop our instrumental sound we chose a number of traditional melodies from India, Greece, Brazil, etc. At first we played these styles in concerts without connections to improvisation. But really the most important thing for us is *sound*, the movement of sound, the beauty of sound and energy, in the context of free improvisation. And Daunik, Benat Achiary, Lê Quan Ninh, Barre Phillips and Alan Joule are musicians with whom I have learned many things about sound and density. Improvisation is fundamentally collective work and the challenge for me is always how to realise a relationship with other musicians, a relationship with sound, and with space."

Those three "relationships" work remarkably well on **Lazro/Doneda/Ninh** (in Situ, 1988), taking Doneda's playing to new heights. The presence of Lê Quan Ninh (born 1961), an improvisor and trained classical percussionist who specialises in the work of John Cage, makes an enormous difference to the rhythmic interpretation of those world folk styles (which were to receive a more conventional treatment by Cottle/Elliott on **Général Gramofon**). Ninh's economy and loose-limbed precision, his refusal to keep filling up space like some free jazz drummers who never seem to know when to be sparing or silent, opens the soundstage for some particularly tense improvising between Doneda and Lazro (alto sax). The saxophonists are also keen to explore the pleasures of subtle pitch relationships and harsh, abrasive textures; the elegance of the traditional Yugoslav 'Prespansko' contrasts sharply with the querulous high register playing on 'Le chien à trois têtes'. This is finely-tuned trio improvising.

Traditional folk influences were in evidence again on **Général Gramofon** (nato, 1988) but this time provided a more obvious structural focus, as heads, for several pieces. Instead of Lê Quan Ninh, a British rhythm section of Laurence Cottle (bass guitar) and Stuart Elliott (percussion) laid down



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solid jazz-rock foundations for Doneda and Lazro to improvise on melodies from Thailand, Yugoslavia, India and so on. The overall sound was polished and smoother in texture — an agreeable blend of world folk, improv, hard rock (Hugh Burns' mobile electric guitar) and Ornettish harmolodics. It probably ranks as Doneda's most 'mainstream' project and I daresay was intended to reach a wider new music audience.

The unaccompanied solo performance has always been the most exposed context for the improvisor, the most unforgiving. Without the security of other performers' stimuli, the shared challenge of creativity, the soloist lays bare the depth and range of their instrumental technique, allied to their capacity for continuous, spontaneous, expressive invention. Consequently, in no other context is the personality of the improvisor so directly revealed.

Improvisation is fundamentally collective work and the challenge for me is always how to realise a relationship with other musicians, a relationship with sound, and with space.

For Michel Doneda, who regards improvisation as primarily a collective music-making experience, **L'élémentaire Sonore** (in Situ,1991) offered an opportunity to present an intimacy of expression not possible in group playing. The album consists of six unaccompanied solo soprano pieces plus two duets with hurdy-gurdy player Dominique Regef. The solo improvisations are based "on ideas I developed alone and for myself only. I would never play them on stage. Therefore the CD is a good vehicle for sharing this sort of intimacy."

Doneda's solo improvising displays a consistent poise and purpose; it eschews flamboyant gestures and superficial theatrical blasting, preferring to develop a line of thought, whether from a thematic phrase or a textural feature, with considered patience and a sensitivity to the subtleties of timbre. On 'Smalt et Sonore', his most vehement statements appear to be set against a resonating percussive surface; for Debussy's 'La Chevelure' he plays in the soprano's lower register, producing a beautiful velvet tone akin to a clarinet, while the fanfare of split tones on 'Le souffle tranche l'ombre' cuts the air with razor blade sharpness. **L'élémentaire Sonore** is one of the finest explorations of solo soprano saxophony I've heard in recent years (place alongside Evan Parker's **Process And Reality** and John Butcher's **13 Friendly Numbers** — the latter is the same age as Doneda), and certainly establishes Doneda as a major (if still under-recognised) innovative voice on this instrument.

Vol Pour Sidney (aller) (nato, 1992), as previously mentioned, was an unusual one-off compilation project, featuring an impressive array of jazz, improv and blues celebrities like British Summer Time Ends, Lol Coxhill, Pat Thomas, Evan Parker, Charlie Watts, Taj Mahal, Steve Beresford, Han Bennink, Lee Konitz and others, working their own magic on a collection of Bechet classics.

"It was Jean Rochard of nato who brought Elvin Jones and me together. When I told Elvin that I was not a jazz musician he simply said: 'Jazz is just playing what you are when you're hurt.' He was so open with me and so open in his approach to the sound. We decided to improvise first and play the theme to 'Egyptian Fantasy' afterwards. That afternoon was a great emotional occasion in my life." He pauses momentarily. "Yes, thank you Sidney, thank you Jean, thank you Elvin." So, as a soprano player himself, does he feel a special affinity to the music of Bechet? "Of course," he laughs, "everybody who loves the soprano loves the Sidney Bechet sound, the incredible energy of that sound."

And "incredible" is a superlative (and an overused one at that) which comes to mind when describing **SOC** (in Situ, 1992), the trio of Michel Doneda, Lê Quan Ninh and Dominique Regef (born 1947).

"I met Dominique Regef about 10 years ago and we have played together in many different types of groups and musical contexts ever since. The music we recorded for **SOC** grew out of this experience of working together year after year. On **SOC** there are three basic directions: free improvisation, collective compositions and interpretation."

The manner in which these three directions overlap and become indistinguishable makes this album a truly compelling journey through sound. And, if you still regard the hurdy-gurdy as a lighthearted, rather comical folk instrument, then you're in for a big surprise! Regef has catapulted this archaic-sounding, polyphonic instrument into the cut and thrust of contemporary improvised music where, to quote British hurdy-gurdy improvisor Stevie Wishart, "because its timbres are relatively unfamiliar to present day audiences it is unencumbered by many of the preconceptions which weigh down upon other western string instruments..." ('Some Observations On The Hurdy-gurdy Past And Present', *Resonance* Volume 2 Number 1, Winter 1993). And don't miss Regef's excellent solo album **Tourneries** (Vand'Oeuvre, 1993) on which Michel Doneda makes an appearance.

On the same subject Michel adds: "The hurdy-gurdy gives to the music the sensation of instability in the sound, and instability here is fragility and subtlety. Also, the hurdy-gurdy and soprano sax work together in high and medium frequencies giving a tension, a strong and sweet tension to the music."

For example, the density of 'Sep' with Doneda's wonderfully controlled, shrill soprano underpinned by the hurdy-gurdy's frenzy of searing strings and buzzing drones. The processional mood of Japanese *gagaku* is the touchstone for 'ggk' where soprano and hurdy-gurdy create a fine gauze of swirling, sho-like textures against a huge backdrop of crashing gongs and cymbals. Again, Ninh's ability to convey horizontal expanse and vertical immensity with relatively few gestures is exemplary. **SOC**'s complex soundworld suggests an extraordinary convergence of opposites: the ancient and the modern, the ritualistic and the spontaneous. Doneda's inquisitive soprano embraces East and West: tone-colours that spring to life not through forced cultural collisions, but from the pleasure of chasing sounds themselves through the glorious uncertainty of improvisation. **SOC** is a masterwork, no less.

In 1989, the old vermicelli factory workroom at the Moulins Albigeois was reopened by the Contemporary Art Centre Cimaise et Portique, as an exhibition space for the purpose of showing artworks inspired by the characteristics of this environment. 1992 saw a collaboration between sculptor/designer Vladimir Skoda, sound engineer Jean Pallandre and Michel Doneda's solo soprano saxophone. Skoda created a number of steel spheri-

Lazro — Doneda

cal sculptures whose surfaces were designed to play with the room's light, shade and geometry.

"It's like a forgotten place, but acoustically completely alive and it's right next to the river Tarn. Vladimir Skoda's steel spheres seemed to have only just been intercepted in their galactic revolution, as if they had fallen from space, but still in motion. I played at three different times during the day when the river was full. The music I played resonated with the energy coming from the spheres, the room and the light. I was always moving as I played, and Jean Pallandre who recorded the music worked in the same way with the microphone and sort of composed his own reality of the musical moment. Vladimir has made 120 original drawings to go with the music. The CD is in fact my first self-production.

"I really enjoy working with other kinds of artists. In Toulouse we have founded an association of musicians (including Lê Quan Ninh), painters, poets, actors, and we organise performances. We don't have much money, but we all enjoy the dynamics of this type of project."

You can hear Michel's response to Vladimir

Skoda's sculptures in the old workroom on **Eclipses** (Poil, 1994). The three improvisations which last for nearly 30 minutes are his most intensive and compelling solo explorations of the soprano, ranging from the fiercest growls contorted by the echoic resonance of the room, to the gentlest sustained tones which drift into the ever-present, hazy roar of the river, or mingle with the drip-drop of rainwater from the ceiling. At one stage the air vibrating inside the horn is as intense as a blow-torch peeling away fragments of notes. Always there's a strong sense of communion between musician and environment, the former feeding off the complex and unpredictable sonic properties of the latter.

In April 1993 Michel Doneda, his wife Pascale Para and African drummer Debu Sungu, travelled to Gabon in West Africa.

"The project involved stopping in the villages and playing with the local musicians. It was a great adventure with differing degrees of success. The important meeting happened in Franceville where we met a group of traditional singers and percussionists, very young people, who lived in a small village. I played with them in Africa and then last May a concert was organised in France. The recording of this concert will be released this December or perhaps early in 1995. The music features five percussionists, a singer, Paul Rogers on double bass, and me. Paul acts as a bridge between the percussionists and myself. The music is completely wild and absolutely improvised. When I played with them in Africa and here in Paris, many archaic sensations, dreams, mental pictures, came to my consciousness. But I can't say intellectually what I do when I play, and I don't want to understand that, either." **R**

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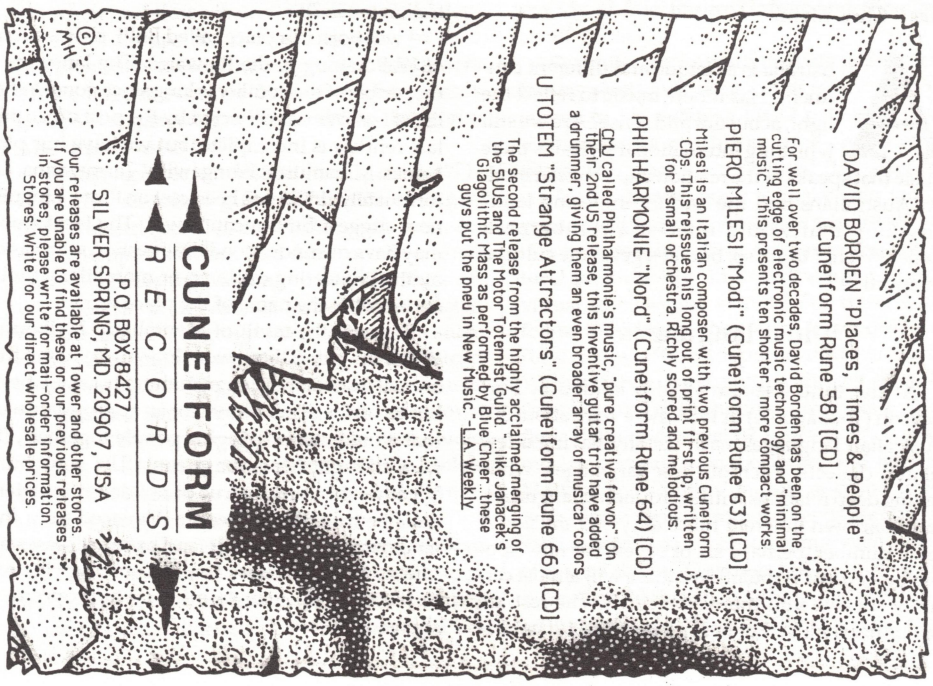
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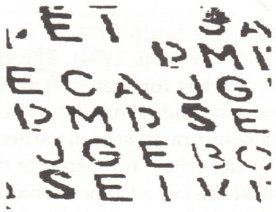


Australian New Music: A Cultural Perspective

Jim Denley

"The light is different in Australia, the acoustics are different, the sense is different. Ripley's 'Believe It Or Not' rang and asked if lyrebirds could whistle Bach cantatas." Chris Mann

Australia is a unique and different continent. Has it new music to reflect the light, acoustics and sense? Are we still whistling international styles? Is there music that speaks of the relationship between modern Australians and the ancient imposing land? Anything that would interest a **Rubberneck** reader? Well, I think so, but let's get some cultural perspective.

lost languages

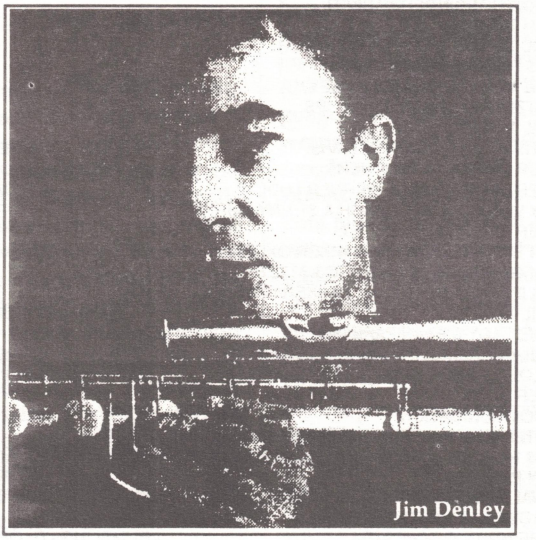
At the time Captain Phillip landed at Port Jackson (Toobagoole) in 1788 there were about 300 Australian languages, each usually having a few related dialects. Each of these languages, while having deep relations with surrounding languages, had their own inherent musicality and musics. A small number, perhaps six or seven, are now spoken by sizeable populations: these will almost certainly survive into the next century. The rest are lost or nearly lost. For every year of white habitation more than one language and its related musics have died. (In the light of this cultural devastation, is it even appropriate to be talking about new Australian music?)

I was born in a place called Bulli, now a suburb of Wollongong in the Illawarra. The language of the people of this locality is long since gone. A short list of basic words collected by the post office mid-last century is incomplete, but we have our place names: Minamurra, Wongawilly, Tarrawanna. Unfortunately, doubt has been cast on these. Linguists now suggest Bulli meant 'two'. The local Kooris may have misunderstood the question when asked by the pioneering explorer, or more likely timber cutter, what the name of the place was.

There is the myth of Moomba in Melbourne. When the city fathers were looking to name their annual festival they magnanimously asked the old blacks on the edge of town for an appropriate word that would mean 'bringing people together'. It is now thought Moomba means 'Up your bum'. Whether this is really true or not doesn't matter, it *could* be true. Would people displaced from their land, ravaged by strange and exotic diseases and intermittent genocide, feel like sharing? It's easy to see that 'Up your bum' is an appropriate response.

When Cook's expedition was forced to land and spend some weeks in north Queensland repairing its ship, they recorded many words of the local language, one of which was 'kangaroo'. When the British set up their penal colony in Sydney Harbour they brought this list with them, assuming the same word for the same animal would be used 2,000 kilometres south. The local Eora people from the Sydney area thought 'kangaroo' was an English word. Confusions like this must have been rife.

From the huge linguistic diversity and sophistication that existed prior to 1788, we now have a nation where the sound of the spoken English seems to vary little between the vast, sprawling suburbs of Sydney, Melbourne, Hobart, Adelaide, Perth or Wollongong. It's extremely hard to place peoples' geographic origins from their accent.


Jim Denley

Where does this leave new music? Well, I think the first and most natural music humans create is in the sounds of speech. Two years ago I was involved in a project where a group of dancers (led by the Bhuto trained Tess De Quincy) and musicians were taken to Lake Mungo (named after the Scottish saint), an ancient dry lake-bed in far west New South Wales. The idea was to collaboratively create a work that would somehow be about that place. The other musicians involved were Rik Rue (digital and analogue tape manipulations), Jamie Fielding[1] (synth and trombone), Shane Fahey (synth and recordings) and Stevie Wishart (violin, hurdy-gurdy and electronics). What struck me most as I experienced this inspiring landscape and grappled with the project, was that I had no words for this place.

We may not always have indigenous words, but of course Australian English is distinctive and full of musicality — a lot of the sound content of our speech may have been influenced by many of those 'lost' languages. Which is one of the reasons I work with the group Machine For Making Sense (**On Second Thoughts**, Tall Poppies TP 034). The group is Rik Rue, Stevie Wishart, myself, with Chris Mann and Amanda Stewart (a keen Bondi Beach bodysurfer, if we're looking for cultural stereotypes!) both using voice and text. When you listen to the way Amanda and Chris spray their words around there is no doubt you are hearing Australian English. On a tour last year around colleges in the Eastern part of the USA the accent defeated audiences. I don't think they understood too much; but I'm sure British audiences, considering the amount of Oz soaps you watch, would be much more sophisticated.

In Chris and Amanda's performances, the colours, timbres, rhythms, syntaxes, diphthongs, timings, intonations and sense, are modern Australian; to then play my instruments (flutes and saxophone) is to rub against their speech music in a larger musical framework, a musical world that is to some extent generated, coloured and controlled by the sounds of speech. It seems like a fair place to start.

Growing up in Wollongong the musical geography of the phonograph was my main inspiration, or so I thought.

I became interested in the new jazz and new contemporary music, and became aware that many 'serious' Australian composers were rejecting European models and looking to Asia for inspiration. (A certain Ocker composer keeps referring to Europe as North West Asia.) I felt the same urge, packed myself off to Tokyo for six months to study

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shakuhachi with Yamaguchi Goro. The local improvisors in Tokyo that I worked with didn't get it, they said: "You want to study traditional Japanese music . . . . baka!" Back in the 'Gong it was obvious that the shakuhachi was as inappropriate as a harpsichord. I began to feel strongly that making music isn't only about sharing it with other people: the third party involved is the land. My land was empty of music.

Austral voices

It's a land crying out for a response. If you grew up with the massive fig and cedar trees of the Minamurra rainforest, if you could walk for a day into the Budawangs where the acacias can be unique to one hidden valley, where the lyrebirds go through their litany of mimicry of an evening innocent of Bach, if you could stand under a waterfall on a scorcher looking out at the sensuous flesh-coloured Angophoras with their bright green leaf, or play in the dunes and beaches of the coast, you would probably want this land to be filled with an appropriate music. Not for the purposes of reverse cargo culture, I'm not wanting to summon ancient Bunyip spirits from the murky depths of Lake Illawarra, but simply to belong to it.

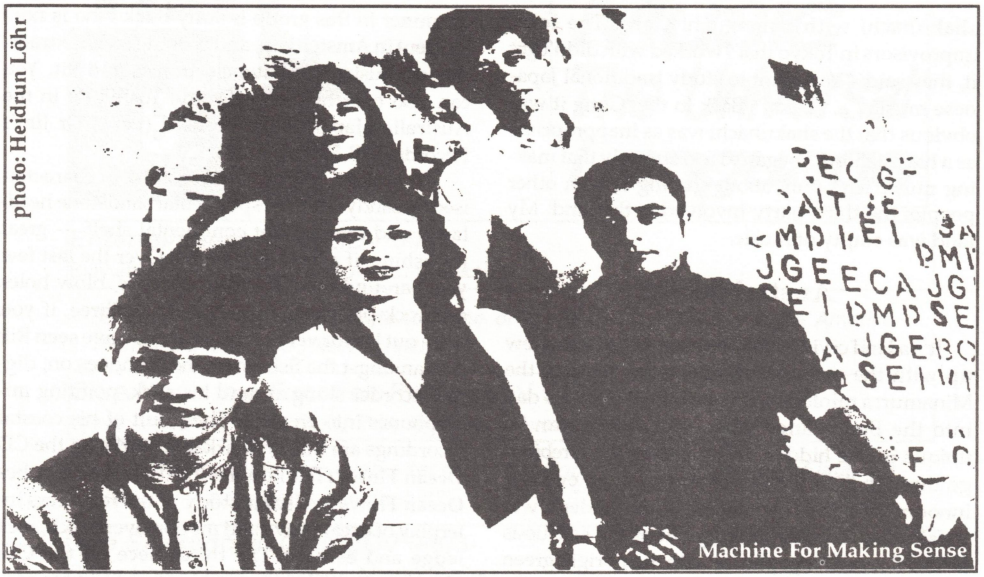
Don't hold your breath, though. A regional, indigenous music style isn't about to surface in the Illawarra. Global village culture doesn't work like that. People move around too much, and if they stay put they can be inspired by music from anywhere in the world. While I was walking in the Budawangs and checking out the lyrebirds I was also getting my musical cues from Braxton, Xenakis and Dolphy, but then again there was also Bernie Mgann.

Things get feral in this country. Bernie's alto sax seems to come out of the earth, the sandstone of Sydney. He is a distinctive voice with an Australian accent within the international language of jazz (hear **Ugly Beauty** on Spiral Scratch). And while I'm on the subject of jazz, a group doing something original and of its time/place is the Sydney-based Necks (**Sex** and **Next** on Spiral Scratch, and a new CD **Aquatic** on Fish of Milk, featuring Stevie Wishart on hurdy-gurdy). They give a feeling of low-key Larikanism with their open-ended, rhythmically intricate piano trio improvisations. The drummer in this group is Tony Buck who is now resident in Amsterdam, and is doing some extraordinary musics with live electronics and kit. You can also hear him with Otomo Yoshihide in the Australian-Japanese group Peril (**Peril**, Dr Jim's Records SUR 536).

All around Sydney the coastline is characterised by sandy beaches, spectacular sandstone headlands and a broad flat continental shelf — great for fishing, if a little dangerous! Over the last few years around the little bays, beaches, blow holes and rock platforms from Nowra to Taree, if you were out late or very early, you may have seen Rik Rue amongst the fishermen, headphones on, digital recorder slung around his neck, pointing microphones into crevices. The result of his coastal recordings are three remarkable works on the CD **Ocean Flows** (Tall Poppies TP 036). He describes **Ocean Flows** as a sonic study of the relentless interplay of ocean wave and motion over beach, rock ledge and estuary. The third piece on the CD, 'Goondiwindi', he says, explores the deeper rock crevices, channels and coastal caves. The title is an East coast word meaning 'water flowing over rocks'.

I began to feel strongly that making music isn't only about sharing it with other people: the third party involved is the land. My land was empty of music.

A lot of people have problems defining Rik's environmental works. I've been out recording with him, and what surprised me was how little tape he wasted. Before recording he would use his ears to find the most interesting locations. Sometimes he wouldn't even bother to record. The material that he likes he edits and multitracks into soundscape compositions. He says they are structured musically. These works are about place. They have to be distinctively Australian in an obvious sense. But it's Rik's other genre, his hyper-rash collision collages where he exposes his ironic and subversive skills. On his own Pedestrian Tapes label he has a large back catalogue of wonderful releases. Rik also has a duo with Shane Fahey called



Social Interiors. A CD of their work will soon be released on the Melbourne label, Extreme. Melbourne is also the home of the journal, *New Music Articles*, which produces a series of cassettes.

By many (usually its residents) Melbourne is thought to be the home of experiment in Australian music. (They also regard the city as the food, football and comedy capital of Australia — Boy, do they have an inferiority complex!) This is probably because Melbourne is a city where you get the feeling that there is a new music community. There are a lot of people producing music down there: vocalist Caroline Conners, composers Warren Burt and Lisa Lim, sound poet the late great Jas H Duke, instrument builder/performer Ernie Altoff, and the ensemble Ellision, are some of the names that come to mind. They have an improvised music collective down there, so they must be a city of joiners!

Finally, I'd like to mention some more Australian innovators based in other areas of the country. The brain behind Brunswick-based NMA Publications is composer/publisher Rainer Linz, who was the co-author of **The Pink Violin** with Jon Rose (see review in **Rubberneck 12**). In recent years Rainer has been collaborating with the performance artist Stelarc, producing some powerful multimedia performances. His interest in sound centres around analogue synthesizers. He is developing software that enables him to 'write' controls to drive them with a computer, so that he can compose with an instrument producing "non-stable tones of varying pitch, but with a precise control."

Those of you who had the pleasure of hearing Greg Kingston play guitar when he was resident in Britain in the mid-80s, will be pleased to know that he is still doing great things down in Hobart — unfortunately no recent recordings. The singer and didgeridoo player Jo Truman is now resident in Stuttgart, and must be one of the few of the thousands of didgeridoo players throughout Europe who has taken the trouble to learn the instrument in the Northern Territory. Her CD **Streamings** is on the Dutch label Staalplaat. Even in that most remote of cities, Perth, way across the Nullabor, they have a healthy new music scene centred around the organisation Evos. One of their luminaries, pianist/accordionist Ross Bolleter, has been finding ruined pianos in sheds and paddocks all over Western Australia, and learning and recording their individual idiosyncrasies. The results are like prepared pianos but with a whole other grunge element (see Tall Poppies label).

Of course, there is much more going on, but

not the space here to list it all. Because of the small population, the big distances between centres and the youth of the culture, there is less of a feeling of separate improv scenes like you get in Europe. In fact, there is no Australian improv scene as such, things tend to mix up a lot more, creating unlikely collaborations. The community radio stations play a big part in disseminating unusual musics, and they always have a policy of allowing access to varied non-commercial musics. Many of the artists mentioned in this article have radio shows or compose and work for the radio. **R**

Note

1. Jamie Fielding died tragically in 1993. I had the pleasure of working with him throughout the 1980s in Mind Body Split (**If It's Not On It's Not On**, Split Records). He had the rare ability to make a DX7 sound rich and unclichéd. He was a wonderful musician who had too few opportunities to record and perform his music. At the time of his death he had completed a recording which will hopefully be released by Extreme.

OTHER RELEVANT RECORDINGS:

Roger Frampton, **Solo Piano** (Tall Poppies); Satsuki Odamura (Tall Poppies); Jim Denley, **Dark Matter** (Tall Poppies); Jim Denley/Kimmo Vennonen, **Time Of Non Duration** (Split Records); Stevie Wishart, **Wish** (Tall Poppies); **Austral Voices** (New Albion Records); Phlem (Dr Jim's Records).

ADDRESSES:

Australian Music Centre, Argyle Centre, The Rocks, Sydney, Australia / **Rik Rue**, Pedestrian Tapes, P.O. Box 213, Pyrmont 2009, Australia / **NMA Publications**, P.O. Box 185, Brunswick, Victoria 3056, Australia / **Tall Poppies Records**, P.O. Box 373, Glebe, NSW 2037, Australia / **Dr Jim's Records**, P.O. Box 45, Clifton Hill, Victoria 3068, Australia.

*Jim Denley (born 1957 — flutes, saxophone, voice) has recorded with Australian groups Mind Body Split, The Relative Band and Machine For Making Sense, and British groups Embers and Chris Burn's Ensemble. He has produced radiophonic works for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation and ORF in Austria. His radio work 'Collaborations' won the Prix Italia in 1989. **On Second Thoughts**, his new album with Machine For Making Sense, is released by Tall Poppies and available in the UK from These Records — Tel: 071 622 8834.*

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Magazines

This year the new music magazine **Audion** celebrates its eighth birthday. #28 (Spring 1994) includes a lengthy interview with Steven Stapleton of Nurse With Wound, a feature on the electronic music label Synkronos, plus the usual wide-ranging coverage of new releases, gig reviews, etc. A vital link for fans of electronic music. *Audion, P.O. Box 225, Leicester LE2 1DX, England.*

Cadence (Vol. 20 No. 10, October 1994) the long-established review of "Jazz & Blues: Creative Improvised Music" is still an invaluable source of information on these musics. This issue contains interviews with Jane Ira Bloom and Dale Barlow, and many well-informed reviews of relevant new recordings, videos, publications, etc. *Cadence, Cadence Building, Redwood, New York 13679-9612, USA.*

Coda Magazine (#256, July/August 1994) has been running for over 30 years, focusing on jazz and improvised music. This particular issue has a strong AACM orientation, featuring an interview with bass player Malachi Favors Maghostut, an article on trumpeter Wadada Leo Smith, and an in-depth review of the recently released **Art Ensemble (1967/68)** 5-CD set on Nessa Records. Reliable and well-informed journalism. *Coda Magazine, Coda Publications, Box 1002, Station "O", Toronto, Ontario, M4A 2N4, Canada.*

Frontal Lobe (#1), based in Huddersfield, is a quarterly dealing in provocative poetry and short fiction, and with a taste for experimental music (a short introductory piece on British improv aimed at the absolute beginner — which is most of the planet, I guess). Contributors include: Jello Biafra, Dave Cunliffe, Steve Sneyd and Mr Green. Seek it out for £1.25 from *Frontal Lobe, 18 Stile Common Road, Primrose Hill, Newsome, Huddersfield, Yorkshire HD4 6DD, England.*

Jazz Podium (August, 1994) is one of Germany's most important and enduring sources of information on a variety of jazz styles. Interviews here include Jean-Luc Ponty, John Scofield and Al Jarreau, plus articles on Joe Pass, Red Rodney and free jazz and the European avant-garde. Workshop reports, gig reviews, tour news and album reviews. In German. *Jazz Podium, Vogelsangstrasse 32, 70197 Stuttgart, Germany.*

Resonance (Vol. 3, No. 1, Winter 1994) contains Sianed Jones' diary account of a tour round Mongolia. Phil England interviews Bob Ostertag; article by Nicolas Collins; tribute to the late John Stevens; Scratch Orchestra 25th anniversary; book and concert reviews. Not to be missed. £3.00 from *Resonance, LMC, 2nd Floor, Community Music House, 60 Farringdon Road, London EC1R 3BP.*

Stride Magazine #36 (*Closed Volumes*, 1994) packs in what seems like an ever-expanding range of artistic activity, particularly in the music arena where its coverage now stretches to free jazz, improv, art/progressive rock and ambient. Also an interview with rock writer Greil Marcus, some J G Bennett-like aphoristic theorising by Robert Fripp, an appraisal of SAF Publishing, Robert Lax on poetry and language, etc. Plenty of album, magazine and poetry reviews. A stimulating, well organised read. £3.95 from *Stride Publications, 11 Sylvan Road, Exeter, Devon EX4 6EW, England.*

The Third Alternative (#2, Spring 1994) promotes 'Slipstream' short fiction and poetry. Editor and publisher Andy Cox says the term implies the sort of writing that slips between "more easily recognised streams... speculative, sometimes horrific, often weird, but it's always relevant..." Contributors include Neil Williamson, Deborah P Kolodji, Chris Kenworthy, Brian Louis Pearce and David Logan. Well presented, worth investigating. £2.50 from *The Third Alternative, 5 Martins Lane, Witcham, Ely, Cambs CB6 2LB, England.*

The Wire (#124 - 129) has featured the innovative likes of Louis Andriessen, Cecil Taylor, Harold Budd, Pharoah Sanders, Sonny Sharrock, Jon Hassell, Laurie Anderson, Einstürzende Neubauten, Markus and Simon Stockhausen, Peter Hammill, Richard H Kirk, Van Dyke Parks, Edgar Froese, The Boredoms and Otomo Yoshihide. Still the

most important music magazine you can buy from your local newsagent. *The Wire, 45-46 Poland Street, London W1V 3DF, England.*

Books

Perfect Lives: An Opera
Robert Ashley
Burning Books/Archer Fields

This is Robert Ashley's libretto to his TV opera **Perfect Lives**, partly commissioned by Britain's Channel 4 and screened by them in several episodes in 1984 — a repeat screening is now long overdue! It's the perfect companion to the soundtrack which is available on CD and cassette on the Lovely Music label, featuring Ashley as narrator with musicians such as "Blue" Gene Tyranny, Peter Gordon and David Van Tieghem. The book also contains a synopsis of the plot and various textual 'explanations' by Ashley, as well as an account of the creative process which brought the opera into being. The complex narrative(s) interweaves fictional characters (of the downbeat sort that might inhabit a Robert Altman film) with philosophical discourse. The different modes of address are reflected in the book's typographical design. Moving, amusing and mysterious, this is a major literary and musical work, and a milestone in recent avant-garde opera. Please, somebody make it available on video format, too. And then inform me! (Available from *Nonsequitur, P.O. Box 344, Albuquerque, NM 87103, USA.*)

Omniverse Sun Ra
Hartmut Geerken & Bernhard Hefele
(published privately)

I haven't seen this publication yet, but the press release informs me that it's the result of 30 years of research by Sun Ra specialist Hartmut Geerken with the help of jazz and rock discographer Bernhard Hefele. It's intended to be a Sun Ra reader, record catalogue and picture book, including essays by Amiri Baraka, Robert Lax, Chris Cutler, Geerken and Hefele, and others. LP-size, approximately 220 pages, in English, limited edition. (Enquiries to *Sigrid Geerken, Wartaweil 37,D-82211 Herrsching, Germany.*)

Chasing The Vibration
Graham Lock
Stride Publications

A collection of interviews from the *NME* and *The Wire* with some of the most important and innovative figures in jazz, with photographs by Nick White. Graham Lock's self-effacing style is never less than translucent, an object lesson to any budding music journalist who wishes to convey their personal passion about the music they love but without losing sight of the primary need to communicate information, sometimes factual information, to the reader. Lock gets the balance about right between character study and musical investigation, including a prickly Cecil Taylor, a shy, quirky Mal Waldron and a determined Chris McGregor. The latter recounts how a racially mixed group like The Blue Notes sidestepped trouble at road blocks in their native, apartheid-torn South Africa: "... we pretended we were a gang of labourers with a captain ... I became the boss and these were my boys, and we were on our way to fulfil a contract somewhere."

Other interviewees include Steve Lacy, Abdullah Ibrahim, Mike Westbrook, Marilyn Crispell, Jimmy Giuffre, Max Roach, Sun Ra and Evan Parker. It goes to show that when music journalism is this lucid and informative it is of lasting value. (Available for £9.50 post free from *Stride Publications, 11 Sylvan Road, Exeter EX4 6EW, England.*)

Rock: The Primary Text
Allan F Moore
Open University Press

"Because of the importance of rock to the leisure industry, with all of this entails," writes Allan F Moore, "the majority of writers on it have not been musicologists." Moore is a Senior Lecturer in Music at an English university and quite rightly suggests that "the sounds themselves" have remained largely unstudied while there's been no shortage of rock sociologists, historians and cultural theorists.

The tone of **Rock: The Primary Text** is academic, but never high-handed. Moore's arguments and case studies proceed with an unflamboyant precision rare in rock writing. He avoids sententious generalisations, inspects each artist/genre (e.g. 60s blues rock, 70s hard rock, 80s

Alquimia ¤ Javier Alvarez ¤ Django Bates ¤ Janet Beat ¤ George Benjamin ¤ Andrew Blake ¤ Simon Limbrick ¤ Ian Carr ¤ Certain Ants ¤ Nicolas Collins ¤ Sarah Collins ¤ David Cunningham ¤ Ian Dearden ¤ Benoît Delbecq ¤ Kevin Duggan ¤ Bob Dylan ¤ Eyeless in Gaza ¤ Sam Fendrich ¤ Simon H Fell ¤ Michael Finnissy ¤ Graham Fitkin ¤ Barbara Gaskin & Dave Stewart ¤ Carol Grimes ¤ Stanislaw Hansel ¤ Jonathan Harvey ¤ Dave Heath ¤ Christopher Heaton ¤ Roger Heaton ¤ Mike Henry ¤ Hession / Wilkinson / Fell ¤ Slate Voices ¤ Nicky Hind ¤ Ivan Husssey ¤ The Irish Chamber Orchestra ¤ Jan Steele ¤ Billy Jenkins ¤ John Kefala-Kerr ¤ Gabriel Keen ¤ Montague / Mead Piano Plus ¤ Su Lyn ¤ Alistair MacDonald ¤ Alex Maguire ¤ Will Menter ¤ Mel Mercier ¤ Vladimir Miller ¤ Stephen Montague ¤ Ben Neill ¤ Paul Nieman ¤ Michael Nyman ¤ Mícheál Ó Súilleabháin ¤ Buxton Orr ¤ Elizabeth Parker ¤ Michael Parsons ¤ Glyn Perrin ¤ Elisabeth Perry ¤ Andrew Ball ¤ Peter Pettinger ¤ Jeremy Peyton Jones ¤ Piano Circus ¤ Barry Edgar Pilcher ¤ Antony Pitts ¤ Andrew Poppy ¤ Powder Room Collapse Orchestra ¤ David Reed ¤ Regular Music II ¤ Steve Reich ¤ Stewart J Robinson ¤ The Rossetti Effect ¤ Howard Skempton ¤ Ashley Slater ¤ Smith Quartet ¤ Soundstrata ¤ Steve Argüelles ¤ John Taylor ¤ This Heat ¤ Jean Tinguely ¤ Julia Usher ¤ Fayyaz Virji ¤ Kevin Volans ¤ Errollyn Wallen ¤ Charles Wharf ¤ John White ¤ Trevor Wishart ¤ ZiZ! ensemble ¤ Neil Ardley ¤ Clive Bell ¤ Terry Bleater ¤ Sarah Butcher ¤ Will Eaves ¤ Andy Goldsworthy ¤ Nicholas Hamlyn ¤ Terry Howe ¤ Andrew Lewis ¤ John McMillan ¤ Sam Richards ¤ Eduardo Reck Miranda ¤ Pauline Stainer ¤ Simon Taylor ¤ John Warwicker ¤ Ben Watson ¤ Graham Wood

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world music) with equal respect, and explains the large quantity of technical language as he employs it (a useful glossary of musicological terms is also supplied). Chapter topics include the theoretical problems of defining 'rock'; an attempt to construct the primary elements of a musicology of rock by examining notation, instrumental and vocal roles, rhythmic and harmonic structures, as they appear in various genres particularly in Britain; a critique of the so-called homological relation between the social identity and values of subcultures and their musical expressions.

The chapter on 70s progressive rock is particularly important since this genre is dismissed by most punk and post-punk writers as pompous self-indulgence. Moore's "critical rehabilitation" of Gentle Giant, Jethro Tull and King Crimson eschews those dismissive clichés and examines the sophisticated and enterprising music itself, not the attendant theatrics which have distracted so many commentators. This is a fine, incisive study which is refreshingly free from bigotry, and plugs a gaping hole in rock scholarship.

RéR Quarterly Vol. 4 No.1
Unfiled: Music Under New Technology
General Editor: Chris Cutler
RéR Recommended

Ever wondered what this legal wrangling over sampling is all about? Fear not, for this issue of the **RéR Quarterly** devotes many of its pages to the legal and ethical debates which have taken centre stage due to the upsurge in the use of sampling technology in the creative process. But first composer Hugh Davies presents a 'History of Sampling' using the term in its widest sense to include a variety of sound recording machines for musical and other purposes.

Canadian "plunderphonics" composer John Oswald and the American group Negativland, whose sampling experiments have brought them both into conflict with the legal representatives of Michael Jackson and U2 over copyright infringement, contribute their sides of the stories in an excellent interview (with Oswald) and article which focus on the interrelated issues of ownership, financial power, creative use of appropriated material, authorship, etc.

Giuseppe Colli and Chris Cutler explore the less debated but no less contentious issue of record companies and artists who are digitally remixing old albums for CD (i.e. altering their musical content) and presenting them to the public as the original albums. Plus Georgina Born on IRCAM, Warrick Sony on independent music culture in South Africa, illustrations by Peter Blegvad, fiction by Frank Key and Allen Ravenstine, etc. High production standards throughout. Always at the forefront of critical debate on issues relating to experimental music, the **RéR Quarterly** is an essential purchase. (Available for £10.00 from *RéR Megacorp, 74 Tulse Hill, London, SW2 2PT, England.*)

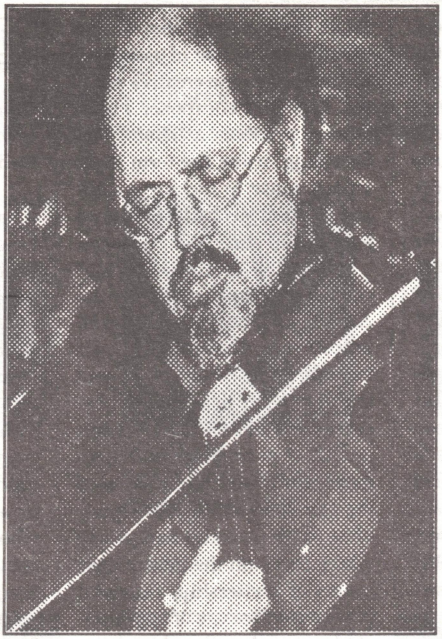
Improview compiled and reviewed by **Chris Blackford**

Live

Clarion Fracture Zone
Live at the Puzzle Inn, Sowerby Bridge, Yorkshire. 29/9/94

It hardly seems possible, but the exigencies of profit have squeezed still tighter — the live review has become an endangered species. Promoters and listings magazines are only interested in previews, while music journals concentrate on available (dead) product. So, going against the grain, here is a report from a place where music actually happens (the critics who breakfast on CDs are welcome to their plastic indignation).

Live has genuine advantages. Sound, for one. The Puzzle Inn is a tiny bohemian enclave where excellent ale, chilli poppadoms and a wonderful extended double room place the musicians in their own resonant box. This jazz/world/avant outfit from Sydney, Australia, sounded so three-dimensional you might think you were listening to some new wonder format beyond CD, DCC, etc (oh yes, it's called real reality). The carefully overlaid tempi of the drummer vied with Aswad's big-PA presentation of their drummer on the current tour. CFZ's careful attention to 60s Blue Note modernism, Horace Silver funk and date-specific latin, lifts fusion from its careless rut. The kind of gig to make you feel that jazz could become a new folk music — witty, warm and engaging. **R**
Ben Watson



Philipp Wachsmann

Twenty five years

When **Rubberneck** asked me to write about myself, I had just been thinking about how I got going as an improvising musician, and how some of the factors might now be changing.

To write about myself must be to write about what interests me. Such explorations, using words, may tend to sound academic (in itself OK) but I want to keep on the hat of creative musician. As an improvising musician, my thinking has tended to be in my music. 'Life' problems have been uncannily mirrored in my relationship to playing: including physical improvements, emotional changes and the deepening of issues (which once started out looking like 'revolution'). Development has led to a journey of changing musical experience, and what follows is a bit of it.

A strong influence was growing up in Uganda with the 'living' museum next door where there were regular performances by some of the best musicians. Some were or had been court musicians. They were still deeply rooted in their own long established context, experiencing only the first onsets of accelerating change. For me the music was complex. Involvement by the musicians was total as was the 'performing'. It was the product of years and generations of musical development and it was in an aural tradition, not being written down.

Western music, of course, involved a miraculous and sophisticated development, but it has paid the price for the way it focused. For me, the process of 'improvisation' was important and essential, not in the sense of 'getting up and improvising', but because of all the thoughts, experiences and constructions that become possible with it. A younger Ugandan musician said on a recent BBC programme that "musicians are very clever people, they can invent anything."

My involvement began with 'contemporary' music, inventing and creating. I saw and abhorred an absence of 'contemporary' life — the public and media were concerned with music written a long time ago, and more seriously had basic attitudes that killed or ignored the joys of 'live or living music'. Musicians tended to be encouraged towards being executants rather than imaginators.

At first I went along a path of semi-improvised, partially determined music — prose pieces, graphic scores, Cage, Stockhausen, Cardew, and various crises in and around notation. This soon led to improvisation. Quite simply, I found that the best part of semi-controlled pieces were the unprescribed bits, and that the 'music' began to take off once the prescriptions were left behind. I was fortunate to have had a marvellous violin teacher, Isolde Menges, whose musicianship was of the highest order. For her, practising was very close to musical discovery and therefore was an experience of exploring many ways of saying something. Her emphasising that "tone is everything" (also the maxim of her teacher Leopold Auer) gave me an entry to the idea that sonority could express in its own right (independent of 'notes'). Incidentally, this was, of course, a central part of the contribution of electronic music. 'Tone' was not notated. Eventually, putting a contact microphone on the violin opened up further possi-

bilities of discovery, though much later I had to 'rediscover' the acoustic instrument and deal with factors of efficiency of sound production.

It is easy to forget that there is a time warp at any given moment. Awareness can vary, and we all move around within our own sphere of contacts and experience. What may have been news to one artist 10 years ago may just now reach the self-consciousness of a second (perhaps stimulated by the verbalisation of a philosopher). Only then, the second artist suddenly realises that s/he has been doing it all along. We can observe many levels of 'knowing'. In another way, each person finding themselves together in one room may be at different stages (in time) of their own developing awareness. In a relationship, two persons can agree, only to find years later that each was seeing something totally different. Make a statement and ask someone else to repeat it back in their own words and a very different imaging is revealed. People think and approach situations in diverse ways. These kinds of ideas are becoming more and more common knowledge... for some.

Improvisation invites one to be a 'whole person' in a 'whole context'. It unifies performance and idea.

However, one must remember that if there is 'collective or common knowledge', it is easier to assess it as a commentator from a distance, than as a doer of a specific event. 'Common knowledge' is also interwoven with time warps.

An important milestone and influence for me has been **Tempi Concertati** by Berio. It is a virtuoso exploration of 'time'. Events occur simultaneously but with differing degrees of 'presence'; they can evaporate on one plane, but re-form on another with new meaning. A tangible action, for example, may transform surprisingly into something that constitutes a totally new phenomenon. Dislocation or development can occur in the listener's memory, in 'retrospect' as it were. Events can occupy the same space simultaneously without being together, or be exactly together. The piece makes games with perception, with concept, with signification. Space (including physical space) interacts fluently with the many ways of observing time, so that 'relativity' and 'gravitational pull' seem quite normal. The human involvement of the musicians and their self-organisation also belong to this picture.

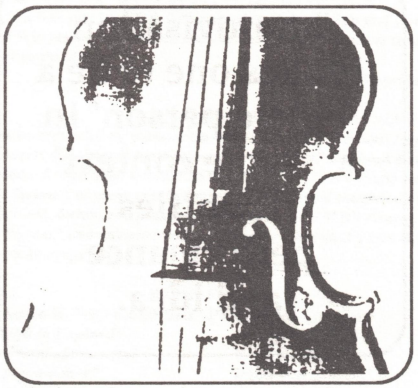
Composition led in a strange direction. Nadia Boulanger was persuasive in unifying the imagining of the moment of actual sound and performance with the act of creating. In the first stages of improvising I was concerned with such ideas. This also involved processes built around actions that were analogous to composition such as setting up or using a framework (e.g. being or constructing 'who I am' to engineer a certain outcome); or such as building up meaning as time goes by (and at the same time incorporating events that do not function chronologically!).

Eventually, stimulated by working with musicians such as Derek Bailey, I became more aware that improvisation could go a lot further than the compositional analogy allowed. Improvisation invites one to be a 'whole person' in a 'whole context'. It unifies performance and idea. This led, amongst other things, eventually to experimenting with switching off the self-conscious mind (left side of the brain), and trying to get more directly to the experience of 'taking off' that all musicians aim at, know of, but might call by different names. Perhaps the end of this particular route was my piece for nato Records called 'Memoires Of An Amnesiac', a homage to Satie's book of that name. In this 'partly improvised piece', I attempted constantly to forget what I had just done. The result was different and at first surprised me by its coherence and fluency. But as with many discoveries, I did not want to remain at the end of that particular road, and the earlier-found joys of hearing a player 'think' remain part of the important picture (even if the thinking begins to 'lurch' in broader directions).

Limitations typified much innovation in this

century — from dodecaphony to **Le Marteau Sans Maitre** and post-serialism. This, of course, played a part — leading to things like "do nothing and a new world opens up". This was very exciting, could heighten abstraction and could transform 'limitation' (e.g. "play no octaves") into something very positive and surprising. It still has a lot of mileage in new and positive ways. As in 'life', parting from expectations miraculously opens up new worlds.

With my solo record **Writing In Water** (Bead, 1985) came the exploration of 'feeling', a new moment, a unity of resources, of being at one with what I wanted to do, and at one with the techniques and material. Attitude, thought, emotion and body, were taken together as part of the production line of a performance and of making music. (Afterwards, this phase ended by giving rise to a need to explore 'definiteness' and 'energy'.)



Well, these are parts of a journey touched upon.

I started off by writing of being horrified by narrow mindedness and prejudice against contemporary living art. Nowadays, I am surprised and reassured by many of the young people who come my way. When asked what 'music' is, the common chant of "harmony and melody" has gone. A broader and more open view has taken its place, showing a better consciousness of social context, flexibility, invention and less 'traditional western-centricity'. Even where stylistic attachments are strong, the explanations are broader and less 'brain washed' (brain dead).

I sense many changes in thinking. I find it easier to communicate musically with more people, and am curious as to what this is all about. Of course, just to please does not work. There seem to be new phases of development ahead, for improvisation.

At the same time as increased awareness, there is the technical revolution and its impact on contemporary thinking, which is greater than generally acknowledged. How we think with and handle so much data; knowledge rather than experiencing; postmodernism, etc; a move from what is 'signified' to the 'signifier'; from content (what is done) to the overall context of the doer, are phenomena bound to affect thought, and are both exciting and horrendous. Whereas I welcome the changes and the broadening of understanding of 'my fictitious listener', I fear the shallowness of his/her going away with a summarised idea rather than 'having been there in an experience'. As in so many areas of English life, there is an appalling devaluation of quality — the supermarket mentality of buying packages (be they of ideas) and taking them home without ever being in a relationship of experiencing, packages not contents, information profusion and data handling not experiencing.

However, all this could, after all, metamorphose into something that looks very different.

Recently I enjoyed a performance by Alfred Brendel of some Beethoven piano sonatas. No longer did I feel that he played a totally pre-planned interpretation with its inherent 'absentness', nor was the interpretation any more in line with the traditional ways of shaping these pieces. It was very shocking. I am sure that what took place was deliberate and a natural progression for him as a player and thinker. It was as if he was refusing to follow the habits of performance that have evolved over the ages. These habits are not to be found in the notated notes, but amount to the development of an aural tradition that has been passed down from one great pianist's generation to the next. One wonders to what extent countless performances have evolved and honed greater fluency and smoother sense than was originally there (familiarity making current habits more 'authentic' or 'right'). New values have been brought to the works that were not part of Beethoven's original imagination. Whereas it is normal that a performer brings something new to a new piece, might this have gone too far over nearly 200 years of piano performing tradition?

Much of Beethoven's music shocked, or was sometimes incomprehensible in its own time. His nature was of this kind. In his performance, Brendel, by returning to the written notes and thinking from scratch without regard for the evolved habits, produced a shocking immediacy that may have been like the original imaging. It would be easy to argue the nature, context and place that these cantankerous manners had in their own time, and show that some of the chord progressions were and still do sound perversely awkward, doubly so because of their rhythmic and metrical placement (if not smoothed over by the manner of the performance). In fact, a friend at this concert, who claimed to be musically conservative, described this performance as "a lunatic's music played by a lunatic."

I wonder, therefore, how 'smooth' some improvisation has become, how slick and 'clever' the listener is in danger of being, and how new ideas and contemporary thinking will strike new ground. For me, the reality of the moment of performance is alive and well, but there is much to be done. **R**

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

Chamberpot (Bead 2, 1976); **Sparks Of The Desire Magneto** (Bead 7, 1977); **Erik Satie** (nato 59, 1983); **Writing In Water** (violin solo) (Bead 23, 1985); **Quintet Moderne** (Bead 26, 1989); **Klangbruecke Bern, Selected Soundscape No. 1** (For 4 Ears, CD 305, 1990); **The Strange And The Commonplace**, Quintet Moderne (Po Torch 19 S, 1991); **Trio Raphiphi** (ITM CD 1465, 1991); **Binaurality**, King Übü Orchestrü (FMP CD 49, 1993); **Grooves 'N' Loops**, Cowws Quintett (FMP CD 59, 1994); **Portraits**, London Jazz Composers' Orchestra (Intakt CD035, 1994).

***Philipp Wachsmann** (born 1944, violin, viola and electronics) won a scholarship to study in Paris with Nadia Boulanger in 1968, and the following year he started an improvisation workshop at Durham University. His improvisation class at London's City Literary Institute has inspired a younger generation of UK improvisors. He is a member of two of the most important European improvising orchestras, King Übü Orchestrü and the London Jazz Composers' Orchestra. In the mid-70s he founded Bead Records which has released many of his recordings.* (Photo courtesy of Philipp Wachsmann)

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Videophile

Documenting fantasy. . .

Two experimental British films, Peter Greenaway's *The Falls* and Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo's *It Happened Here*, which use the documentary form to construct elaborate fantasies...

The Falls (1980)
Dir. Peter Greenaway, Music: Michael Nyman
Connoisseur Video CR 157
185 mins, Colour

The Falls is arguably Peter Greenaway's most demanding film: an epic three-hour journey through the labyrinth of his game-playing imagination. The central premise on which the 'narrative' is based seems to be that approximately 19 million individuals have become victims of an apocalyptic catastrophe, the Violent Unknown Event (VUE), which has left them with various debilitating medical conditions (the early physiological signs of mutating into birds), speaking in bizarre, private languages, and interested in ornithology and/or human flight. All are now immortal. The viewer is presented with a selection of 92 brief case histories of victims registered in the Directory published by the committee investigating the VUE: the surnames of these selected individuals begin with the letters FALL.

Greenaway's 11 years as a film editor at the Central Office Of Information, an arm of the British Home Office, laid the foundations for his enduring fascination with bureaucracy and bureaucratic methods of collecting and collating statistical information. Add a generous pinch of parody, a Borgesian (read the classic **Tlön, Uqbar, Orbis Tertius**) attention to detail, documentary voice-overs and interviewers, and you have something of the tone of **The Falls** (which took five years to assemble). Its preoccupation with strange characters, absurd statistical data, birds, English landscape and water photography feature in earlier (and later) Peter Greenaway films such as **Dear Phone** (1976) **Water Wrackets** (1978) and **A Walk Through H** (1978) — available on **Peter Greenaway: The Early Works** (Connoisseur CR 012), see review in **Rubberneck 10/11** — but in **The Falls** receive a more thorough-going treatment. The staggering complexity of the information crammed into these case histories makes the video format particularly appropriate; repeat viewing offers a relaxed way of absorbing the literary intricacies. The director has suggested that the viewer take the work a little at a time, or fast-forward if and when desired — there is no compulsion to view its three hours in one sitting or in any set sequence. It's to be viewed as one uses an encyclopedia. In the long term, however, interactive video might prove to be the film's most effective format, where each of its 92 sections could be separately indexed to ensure speed and accuracy of access, and options to programme section order or adopt shuffle mode would invite further viewing strategies.

While the film offers no clear allegorical reading, the title may suggest the biblical fall of Man. Birds, who are possibly responsible for the VUE, are perhaps presented as idealised, liberated creatures whose enhanced powers of vision and flight are desired by mankind, hence the preoccupation with human attempts to simulate bird flight and references to the fall of Icarus. The transmigration of souls (dealt with in the bird imagery of **A Walk Through H**) is again suggested by the victims' development of bird physiology, perhaps in preparation for this spiritual journey.

Allegory or not, Greenaway's principal achievement in **The Falls** is to have created a compelling and consistent world sustained by the conventions of the documentary form; however

absurd or hilarious the revelations appear, the mode of representation (the sober voice-overs, the restrained camera movements, the use of found footage, the teeming cross-references inside the film and to other (even future) Greenaway films, etc) rings true. When a narrator questions the veracity of the VUE itself, it serves to reinforce the foundations on which the whole enterprise is based. If there's a darker side to the film, it's that it reminds us of the sinister way governments control and fabricate the nature of the information they disseminate to their populations through the seemingly reliable structures of bureaucracy. **The Falls** is Peter Greenaway at his most engagingly bizarre and challenging, and further proof that he is Britain's greatest living film writer and director.
Chris Blackford

It Happened Here (1964)
Dir. Kevin Brownlow and Andrew Mollo
with Pauline Murray
Connoisseur Video CR 159
95 mins, Black & White

Kevin Brownlow (documentary film maker, author, and film restorer, specializing in the silent era of Hollywood) began **It Happened Here** when he was 18 and co-director Andrew Mollo (military historian, assistant director and production designer) was a mere 16 years of age. After 10 years of piecemeal shooting on a miniscule budget the film was financed by Tony Richardson's Woodfall Films. The film asks: What might have happened if the German army had successfully invaded Britain in the 1940s? This is explored in the form of a documentary-style narrative without the use of stock footage or newsreels: all the atmosphere of a nation under occupation is recreated in absorbing detail (posters in the street, Nazi broadcasts and music on the radio, etc) and using an almost entirely non-professional cast. Pauline Murray plays the District Nurse who joins the Immediate Action Organisation, a group of British collaborators who now promote the doctrine of National Socialism. Soon she discovers the evil that lies behind this efficient bureaucracy which purports to offer the country a new stability and purpose.

The film's great strength resides in its understated treatment of the emotive subject matter; its ability to show the barbarity of fascism with an almost analytic detachment and without the usual moralising tone. It's a skilful blend of documentary realism and imaginative hypothesizing that never falters under the weight of its considerable ambitions. Hardly seen for 30 years, **It Happened Here** is a triumph of low-budget, independent British film-making. The opportunity to see it now should not be missed.
Chris Blackford

Like Water For Chocolate (1992)
Dir. Alfonso Arau
with Lumi Cavazos, Marco Leonardi
Electric Pictures EP0051
109 mins, Colour

This is chosen as an example of the art-house fare now widely available on video soon after cinema release. Although attention is currently focused on Asian cinema, Mexico produces a significant number of films, of which the recent **Cronos**, a dark, brooding horror piece, is highly recommended. **Like Water For Chocolate** itself followed a common route: festival acclaim leading to limited, targeted, cinema release, in this case including success in the US, which is understandable since there are elements of the 'feel-good' about it. Based on a famous novel, **Like Water** is a story of love and passion in the early part of this century; food becomes the central device through which

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these emotions are expressed. Folk tales and the supernatural play an important part in the narrative, politics less so; the revolution appears as a 'noise off' which occasionally intrudes. This has been celebrated as a 'women's film' (some individual women in control, some subversion of the patriarchy); it has to be said that the issue of class is hardly touched on. Servants pass on recipes which transform lives, but they remain servants; the camera lingers elsewhere. Stylish and entertaining all the same.
Gerard F Tierney

Autobus (1991)
Dir. Eric Rochant
with Yvan Attal, Kristin Scott-Thomas, Charlotte Gainsbourg, Marc Berman
Artificial Eye ART 042
93 mins, Colour

It's commonly accepted that there is massive overproduction in French cinema, which means many French films never travel abroad, and doubtless don't deserve to. When a successful piece of French product does enjoy some success abroad, it seems churlish to complain, especially as this is a well constructed piece of work, but I found it pretty thin stuff compared to, say, the films of Olivier Assayas, which haven't broken out of the festival circuit over here.

Rochant got some fine performances out of the cast of his first feature, **Un Monde Sans Pitie**, and there's nothing wrong with the acting on display here either, but I found the storyline idiotic and the characters unsympathetic. Others have argued that it's all terribly gripping (non-entity tries to 'be someone' by hi-jacking a school bus), and some of the plot twists are certainly fresh, in a sort of daft existential way. It's also a welcome change from the world of morose Parisian student types found in Rochant's earlier film, but I have to confess to wanting a wholesale massacre to break out by the time I'd reached the 30-minute mark. R
Gerard F Tierney

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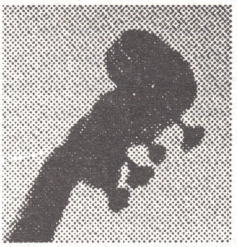

Report On The Composition Of Improvised Music No. 2

Simon H Fell

In **Rubberneck 15** I wrote of an encouragingly successful attempt to synthesise improvisation and composition within a 'classical' concert environment, and during that essay I made mention of further work to follow which would seek to effect the integration of advanced modern composition into the traditional free improvisation performance arena. Whilst I am acutely aware that this process of synthesizing composition, improvisation and jazz is not a revolutionary new concept, it is one which has yet to see a full and satisfying flowering with all parts fully exploiting their stylistic fecundity. Thus, I can only hope that further notes from a deluded seeker for this (possibly imaginary) Holy Grail may prove of some interest to practitioners and enthusiasts of all three (overlapping) art forms.

In my last essay, **Report On The Composition Of Improvised Music No. 1**, I spoke of the "fear of freedom" which paralyses many classically trained musicians in a freely improvising situation; my next project in this vein was to give me ample chance to explore the hysterical reaction to the predetermined, which can so effectively emasculate the work of even the finest improvisors when their performance is combined with a notated structure. I use the term 'hysterical' in its technical sense, since the restrictions that the musicians feel they are put under are often far more dramatic and overwhelming than the actual demands of the score. It is the presence of the score itself, with all that that implies (the dead hand of Western musical imperialism, etc.) that generates the antipathetic reaction from the improvisor, rather than the musical text itself.

unthinking traditionalism

Improvisors must realise that it's unthinking traditionalism that is the enemy, not necessarily the simple act of notation of ideas. Possibly some of improvisation's elder statesmen and women, in fighting hard for improvisation to be identified as a performance ideology in its own right (without the necessity of support/interference from structures), have fetishized the presence/absence of a composition to the point where for many improvisors the appearance of notation can almost paralyse their creative faculties. There is room (and a need) for a looser conception of a score/notation which can accommodate (and flow fluidly around) the freedom of improvisation. Both composers and improvisors must try to work towards being less dogmatic in this respect — blow up the music

schools as well as the opera houses, Pierre!

In my own music, for example, I try to stress that the composition has neither more nor less importance than improvisation, but should be treated with the same flexibility, playfulness, recklessness and respect. Composed sections should not be adhered to at the expense of improvisation, but if you're not improvising then do pay attention to the notes/instructions as they're worthy of just as much care. You don't have to play the right notes/rhythms, etc., all the time, but you should always have an idea of what you're supposed to be doing, even if you decide to do something else!

'scoreophobia'

The problem of hysterical aphasia resulting from 'scoreophobia' seems to be particularly acute for those musicians who perform in the style loosely categorised as 'free jazz', since often this form of performance can revolve around a high level of ecstatic commitment to physically very demanding playing which, by its very nature, tends to make the musicians less able to be aware of cues, numbers of bars, timings, or other structuring devices. However, because, unlike some of my improvising colleagues, I wish to see my deep love of jazz and swing rhythms reflected as a core part of my work, it is these free jazz musicians whom I often find most interesting and useful in bridging the gap between (obviously) jazz and improvisation. In November 1993 I was to have the opportunity to spend some considerable time coming face-to-face with the problems involved in making the link to the third constituent, composition, in a way which could prove fruitful.

Music For 10(0) was a commission from Leeds' Termite Club for an evening-long piece to celebrate their 10th anniversary, to be performed at the 1993 Termite Festival. In itself this was a rather strange proposition: a club which for 10 years had been associated in most people's minds with a pretty uncompromising strain of highly committed improv, commissioning a *composer* for a *piece*? Of course, the Termite had also been the birthplace of a sort of mini-resuscitation of British Free Jazz in the persons of Alan Wilkinson and Paul Hession — with whom I have had the pleasure of performing extensively in a trio — and the club's other Founding Fathers, Paul Buckton and John McMillan, had been among the first people I had ever attempted to improvise with in the late 70s. In view of all this, there was a known empathy between myself and the Termite 'school' as improvisors. It was still something of a shock to be asked to write a composition, but a very pleasurable challenge seemed to be guaranteed.

Some of the 10 musicians who were to take part in the premiere I knew to be particularly prone to this 'clamming-up' process when presented with even a few bars of notation, and much thought would have to be given to devising a way to enable them to improvise to the best of their ability within the context of a composition. Other 'problems' included the fact that four of the 10 musicians didn't read music, one or two of whom had no real experience of producing or intention to produce 'notes', pitches or anything remotely resembling them!

In my own music, for example, I try to stress that the composition has neither more nor less importance than improvisation, but should be treated with the same flexibility, playfulness, recklessness and respect.

Music For 10(0) was composed more or less immediately after the **Concertino** referred to in the **Rubberneck 15** essay, and as a consequence I was keen to further explore some of the techniques which I had developed during that work and which were described in the previous essay. In particular, the idea of having a multi-level multi-focus approach seemed to be a valuable one: where pitches, rhythms, textures, playing techniques, phrases, melodies and compositional sections could all be utilised, ordered and varied to create patterns and symmetries independent of each other. It gave the opportunity of creating a three-dimensional structure which had the possibility of melodies, harmonies, rhythms and orderings in any and/or every parameter at any given time, on anything from the microstructural level to the macromovement to the Global Unity.

ALAN WILKINSON

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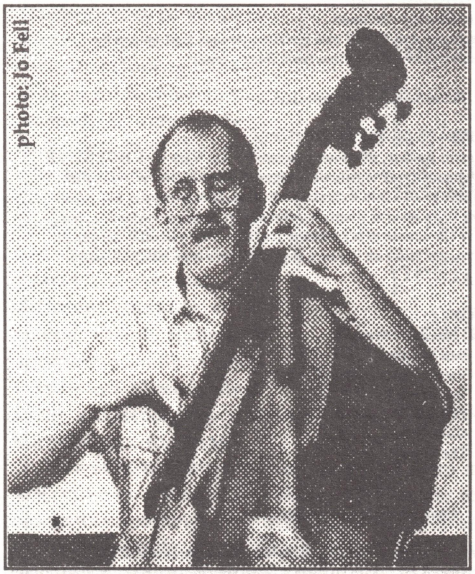
BRUCE'S FINGERS

I felt this approach might also prove helpful for the improvising musicians involved, since the evening out of the balance between pitch and texture, between harmony and dynamic, etc., would serve to make the process of composition less pitch-centred and therefore more assimilable by musicians unused to playing complex atonal (pitch-orientated) music.

For Music For 10(0) a macrostructure of different instrumental effects, tempi, stylistic influences and quotations was built on a matrix derived from (of course) the figure 10. It's not really within the scope of this essay (and possibly may prove not



too interesting) to discuss at length the way this basic structure was generated and then compacted down in a sort of musical *origami* to form not only phrase and bar lengths and structures, but also to give the very note order and rhythmic flow of the five main themes of the work itself.

In order to try to overcome some of the problems I had previously encountered in giving first performances of complex works, half the commissioning fee was given over to pay for rehearsals for the performance (No other source of rehearsal funding being available; the other half of the fee went on recording the performance. 'Twas ever thus!). After some scrupulous and in-depth initial rehearsal, it transpired that all the musicians — even those with very little experience of scored music — could find their way around the notes and cues I had written with varying degrees of prior preparation. Simple hand cues and counts seemed to provide reliable structural indicators and the stage was set for an interesting and exciting performance.

However, it was during the final rehearsals that I started to notice that there seemed to be an inversely proportional relationship between the extent to which the improvisation which lay at the heart of the work was reintroduced, and the amount of accuracy which the musicians displayed in picking up on their cues or keeping their place. Although this was understandable, perhaps, as far as those musicians who were actually improvising at any given time was concerned, what was more remarkable was that the other musicians, becoming intrigued/enraptured/mesmerised by their colleagues' work, also missed their cues, playing increasingly inaccurately in such notated passages as they had. It was as if the increasing presence of improvisation had spread an intangible air of otherworldliness among the musicians, causing them to drift from the intensely studied application to their parts which was necessary when they were not improvising.

Theorists of Transcendental Meditation believe that if a sufficient proportion of the population were meditators, then the beneficial effects of meditation (love, peace, social harmony, etc.) would spread by a mysterious osmosis through the non-meditating population. I felt I was witnessing a similar mysterious process taking place through the magical powers of *Transcendental Improvisation*; musicians were becoming so moved by their colleagues' performance that they had, for a brief period, become listeners only instead of performers. (Perhaps this is what is so special about improvisation; the ability to pass from being a listener to being a performer and back again completely at will.) It would seem that one of the greatest problems in combining composition with the tradition of free music is that while performing predetermined material, musicians may have to partly switch off or desensitize their listening faculties,

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which are crucial to their whole improvising existence, only to switch them back on again at the drop of a hat. This is no mean request (indeed some would say it's an undesirable aim at best) and perhaps some of my more sceptical readers will feel that if I and others like me insist on trying to create this Frankenstein's monster, then it would serve us right if the whole house of cards (or Gothic castle) were to fall about our ears!

At the same time, those musicians to whom I was looking for the most committed improvisation, were beginning to pull in their horns under the imaginary pressure of 'the score'; the situation was rapidly developing into the worst of both worlds, and something needed to be done. Well, as Charles Ives said: "If a composer once starts to compromise, his work will begin to drag on him. Before the end is reached, his inspiration has all gone up in sounds (or ideas) pleasing to his audience, ugly to him." (I'm sure Ives meant to write him/her, of course.) In other words, I'd better perfect this art of skating on thin ice or be prepared to fall through and disappear from sight as a warning to others, but no turning back for the comfy pipe and slippers of the LMC Diner's Club!

I felt I was witnessing a similar mysterious process taking place through the magical powers of *Transcendental Improvisation...*

So, newer, more acutely unignorable methods of cuing the musicians were devised. Large cards with cue letters made their first appearance during the performance, frightening some of the musicians half to death, I'm sure. (I couldn't help remembering Zorn directing **Cobra**, but I wanted a music less variéd but more *varied*.) Increased leeway was introduced with regard to the length and positioning of improvised pieces/passages, and in jazz passages simpler bass lines and rhythmic impetus introduced easier bar counting. Some musicians still found it bewildering and difficult (and perhaps pointless although they were too polite to say so to me) to switch within the space of 10 seconds from Webernian pointillism to raucous improvisation to hard-driving small-band swing, but on the whole we managed.

Like most first performances, that night at the Termite Festival exposed weaknesses and prolixities in the score which needed revising, but the second and subsequent performances (when will they be...?) will just get better and better. Alan Wilkinson's memory of that first performance was that it was "chaotic"; certainly the music was among the most unpredictable, raucous, gentle (yes — Movt. VI!), humorous and nerve-wracking I have played or even heard. Whilst I wouldn't claim that this is yet the Perfect Synthesis of the Three Forms, it is perhaps (along with **Compilation II**) my nearest realisation so far. (At least until **Compilation III** is ready — but more about that later!)

Above all, the experience seemed to confirm for me as a composer that although the challenges involved in composing for improvisors can be almost overwhelming, it is only by incorporating and exploiting the input of fully committed improvisors that composition can hope to be revitalized and genuinely *new* music be created. The future certainly does not lie in fashionable harmonic platitudes spun out by cliquey Academicians, but composition does have a role as a supporter and shaper of (and alternative to) improvisation which can guarantee it a lifespan beyond a mere 400-year Western European hiccup — improvisation being (of course) universal and timeless. As an improvisor, I'd just about agree to that! **R**

Music For 10(0) was performed on November 25th 1993 by Guy Llewellyn (French horn), Charles Wharf (clarinet, bass clarinet, soprano and tenor saxes), Pete Minns (tenor sax), Mick Beck (tenor sax), Alan Wilkinson (alto and baritone saxes), Mary Schwarz (viola), Paul Buckton (guitar), John McMillan (electronics), Paul Hession (drums), with the composer, Simon H Fell, on double bass. The work also included a series of texts by Leeds-based poet Out To Lunch, read by the author. A recording of the revised score of **Music For 10(0)** is scheduled to be released during 1995 by Leo Records.

***Simon H Fell** (born 1959) runs the Bruce's Fingers record label which he founded in 1983. The new Hession/Wilkinson/Fell album **The Horrors Of Darmstadt** is released by Shock. For more information about Bruce's Fingers please send a SAE/IRC to* 24 Chauntry Road, Haverhill, Suffolk, CB9 8BE, England.

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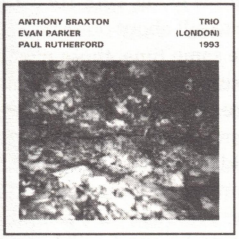

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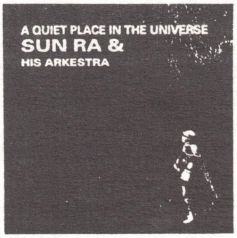

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These CDs have been around for a while, but not many people seem to have noticed. How do you think it feels when one of the most innovative and fascinating pioneers of *musique concrète* (organised sound, if you like) is totally ignored while talentless amateurs pontificate on nationally distributed magazines? It hurts, of course. We're talking about the re-release of the decade.

It's pretty much impossible to communicate adequately in print the beauty, the craft embedded in these works. It was the early 80s when Dockstader created these pieces by means of razor blades, splicing tape, crude equipment (you get the picture) at the studio where he worked as a recording engineer "while nobody was looking". Fantastic booklets, composer's notes, pictures, accurate digital mastering, excellent sound... need I say more. With regard to his influence, listen to these CDs (distributed by RéR) then go listen to Eno's VCS3 intro to 'Gloria Gloom' on **Matching Mole's Little Red Record**. You read it here first.
Giuseppe Colli

Sakis Papadimitriou
Piano Oracles
Leo CD LR 163 CD

The sleevenote says that Papadimitriou is self-taught. Whatever his history, he has had the strength to fashion a new and fully rounded technique on the piano which combines preparing the strings, working percussively on the strings and just playing the keyboard more fluently than anyone else I've heard.

The two sections of this CD ('Alpha' and 'Beta') have been released by Leo before on different LPs ('Alpha' on an LP of the same name and 'Beta' on **First Move**), although this doesn't mean the LPs are superseded — the *other* side of **First Move** is superb. However, they are a good combination showing different strengths. 'Alpha', a suite of 11 short pieces, is partly composed, mainly melodic. The piano appears in many guises: as abstract percussive space or as the ghost of other instruments (zither, koto). The playing is restrained, controlled, sometimes astonishing: for example, the final track. 'Beta' is a 20-minute improvisation from 1985 which shows Papadimitriou's skill at sustaining large shapes, suggesting space. Above all it shows how far he has succeeded in taking piano technique beyond hitting or attacking the strings, how far he has gone beyond mere 'extensions' of technique and actually stepped into a wholly convincing but larger soundworld.
Nick Couldry

Hession/Wilkinson/Fell
The Horrors Of Darmstadt
Shock SX025 CD

Parker/Guy/Lytton
Imaginary Values
Maya MCD 9401 CD

Unlike most improvising groups of their thirty-something generation, Hession/Wilkinson/Fell have a reputation which precedes them, a reputation for hardcore free jazz. 'The Horrors Of Darmstadt', the 32-minute title-track from their latest CD, quickly gives the throttle plenty of talk, and before long there's oil under the fingernails and a smell of petrol in the air (heightened by the grassroots live recording at the Termite Club in Leeds, 1993). 'Zabaglioni' sets up a new, exciting tension between the textural grind and machine-like noise of Wilkinson's sax and Fell's bass, and Hession's hyperactive, polyrhythmic drumming

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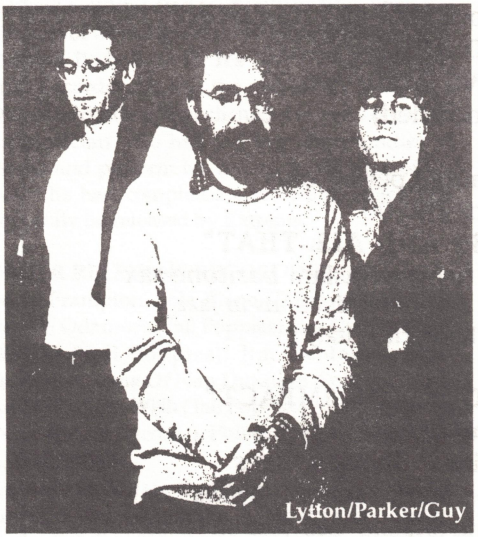
out of the Elvin Jones free jazz tradition (and reminiscent of Mujician's Tony Levin). It's a tension that's resolved on the corrupted sentimentality of 'Claggy, But In Love' but resurfaces for the concluding 'Chinary Ung'. Free jazz or free improv? Hession/Wilkinson/Fell are on the cusp of something really fascinating; a drive away from their current jazz influences towards the untrammelled pleasures of abstraction, however, would see the full flowering of this powerful trio.

The longstanding trio of Evan Parker, Barry Guy and Paul Lytton has the free jazz heritage at its fingertips, but has developed an original sound


Lytton/Parker/Guy

based on highly evolved personal vocabularies which fall outside identifiable idioms. **Imaginary Values** is a live set recorded at London's Red Rose Club in 1993 and reinforces the view that this trio is one of the very best at work in free improvisation. 'Form' is a stunning example of how cohesive the group has become with Parker's agitated phrasing cutting into Guy's *arco* smears and stormy rumbles; Lytton's role is never one of merely underpinning or filling out the sound, his redoubtable speed constantly shifts the textural emphasis from sheets of polymorphous activity to the gentlest pitter-patter of woodblock and snare, or gelid strokes of cymbal and hi-hat — and all in the twinkling of an eye. Parker drops out almost imperceptibly to show that a trio doesn't have to be three blokes playing at the same time all the time, and later rejoins to ease up the pace. This is an attempt to give something of the flavour of just one track: the other eight are just as astonishing. **Imaginary Values** is improv at its finest and most characteristically intense — teeming with the sort of subtle nuances of mood and timbre that you could never in a million years arrive at through notation. Credit also to Dave Bernez whose crystal recording brings out the sensitivity of these great improvisors.
Chris Blackford

Keshavan Maslak & Paul Bley
Romance In The City
Leo CD LR 104 CD

Keshavan Maslak
Loved By Millions
Leo CD LR 105 CD

Although they have consecutive catalogue numbers, these two releases were actually recorded 13 years apart. LR 104 is a new release, while LR 105 is a re-release of a record from 1980. Taken together they provide an interesting insight into the development of Keshavan Maslak.

Despite recording since the late 70s, Maslak remains a rather hazy, mysterious figure. A US resident of Russian extraction, he has often employed the alias 'Kenny Millions'. If this indicates a quirky sense of humour, his work confirms that. On **Loved By Millions** he plays alto sax, tenor sax, clarinet and flute, and frequently adopts a tone which sounds gently mocking, even playful. Sometimes he sounds as if he could be laughing through his instrument. This is not merely out of jollity. He plays around with the form of the material, sometimes verging on parody and often adding ironic touches. For instance, the track 'Romance In The Big City' sounds as if it could be from a French movie soundtrack, but is gently sent up by Maslak's playing. This sense of mockery even extends to titles. So, a Maslak solo track is evocatively called 'When You Look At Me I Want To Vomit'! Throughout this record Maslak is superbly supported by Sunny Murray on drums and John Lindberg on bass. Both give flawless performances,

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with Lindberg on top form, from the walking bass line on 'Compulsive Lust' to his bow work on 'Loved By Millions'.

Leaping ahead 13 years, it is no surprise that Maslak sounds maturer; he is more prepared to play it straight when the occasion demands. Throughout **Romance In The City** romance seems to be the key word, and the mockery and irony are much diluted. Some passages are lush enough to be George Michael intros! The track 'Romance In The City' recurs from the previous record, but the treatment of it is vastly different. Here it is much mellower and more melancholy. Surely there is no need to say that Paul Bley is wonderful; these days he is rarely otherwise. He provides a solid underpinning when required, and Maslak sounds far better with him than without him. Although this album does contain a solo track from Bley and two from Maslak, these are less interesting than the duo pieces.

John Eyles

Geoff Serle
Severe Test
Systems Collusion SCCD 8001 CD

Earl Howard
Pele's Tears
Random Acoustics RA 004 CD

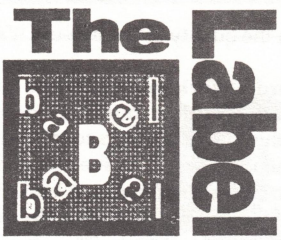
Geoff Serle has collaborated widely over the past decade (including work with Jon Dobie of B Shops For The Poor) and this is a chance to hear work from many different collaborations (Dobie, David Cross, Mark Hewins, Francine Luce, Sheila Maloney, Chiemi Nagata, Elliott Sharp and Pat Thomas). Until now, his recordings have been mainly on the German label Ear Rational; Systems Collusion is his own label. Serle's electronics work under strict control, as instrumental voice or as mediator between other instruments, an ironic, disruptive element in the dance mix. The balance and poise is often subtle, above all on the track with Elliott Sharp (for me the best on the album) where Serle's "backward drums" are an excellent foil to Sharp's eloquent, floating guitar line. Even so, I found much of the album rather cold and flat, many of the tracks don't seem to move anywhere and the drum machine programming was dull to my ears. Given the quality of the line-up, it's disappointing.

Earl Howard's work belongs more to the *musique concrète* tradition: minutely detailed soundscapes which use electronics to try and construct an independent world where recognisable instruments survive as fragments, at best. **Pele's Tears** has three long tracks of straight electronics with many interesting moments. They conjure a slightly deranged world of musical boxes, mechanical bells, mangled fragments of organ fantasias (shades of Christian Marclay). But I did wish for a greater variety of sound textures, a less trebly, fuller sound. I also have doubts about whether the pieces work interestingly as structures: overall they seem a little static with not enough changes of pace. However, I forgot these doubts when I heard the two short group improvisations (with Frank Gratkowski, Melvyn Poore and Hans Schneider) which end the album. Here the electronics comes alive in a much richer context: abstract and austere certainly, but exceptionally dense and menacing. Schneider's double bass, in particular, cutting into the textures superbly. I want to hear more.

Nick Couldry

Mal Waldron & George Haslam
Waldron—Haslam
SlamCD 305 CD

A nicely-recorded studio set made in February 1994 when the duo were touring the UK. They reportedly struck up a rapport instantaneously, something which is borne out by this wonderfully intricate exchange. The most rewarding pieces are perhaps the two highly-structured improvisations which W&H approach with great poise and control. In fact, more of the same might have been in order — the tour round the beauty spots of 'If I Were A Bell' is all very fine, but not such an adventure. Haslam's baritone playing is spiked with the vigour to animate the languorous gravity of his instrument. His 'Vortex' (named after the London venue) is playful and eloquent. Waldron is a famously well-documented musician but remains fascinating to listen to as he's always ready to unearth the new in familiar contexts. The simple ingenuity he brings to the development of the



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'Listen and be rudely awakened, or better still get blind drunk and relive those package tour nightmares.' Q magazine

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New Release! - December 1994

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Steve Argüelles, Julian Argüelles, Huw Warren, Stuart Hall, Mick Hutton

Babel, 29A Connaught St, London W2 2AY, Tel: 0171-262-0836

18-minute closer 'Motion In Order' (which could, perhaps, have given a title to the album) is superb. Ellington looms large throughout and there's one song by, and one for him. In the end, hearing the musicians listen so intently to each other is a joy. The chess analogy of the cover seems inappropriate: this is a dialogue with neither winner nor loser.
Will Montgomery

Lol Coxhill/Steve Lacy/Evan Parker
Three Blokes
FMP CD 63 CD

Summit meeting of three of the improvising world's major saxophonists who also happen to be soprano players. Four duets and a brief trio to conclude. Evan Parker's interest in lyrical, sometimes thematic playing is emerging frequently these days (check out the recent duo and trio releases on Leo Records with Anthony Braxton and Paul Rutherford, and the solo/multitracked album **Process And Reality** on FMP). 'The Crawl' between Parker and Steve Lacy is also recognisably melodic; often one musician initiating a melodic idea and the other picking up and rounding off the phrase. In full flight this incredibly intricate understanding has the ornate splendour of a baroque fugue. Lacy's occasionally 'pushy' tone, which grips certain phases of 'Backlash', nudging Parker into a role of recipient and embellisher of another's ideas, surfaces more strongly on the Coxhill/Lacy duet, 'Glanced'. Here the American's delightful, boppish vigour (with flashes of Monk) for a while begins to nudge Lol Coxhill, too, into a somewhat fragmentary supporting role to Lacy's bold melodies.

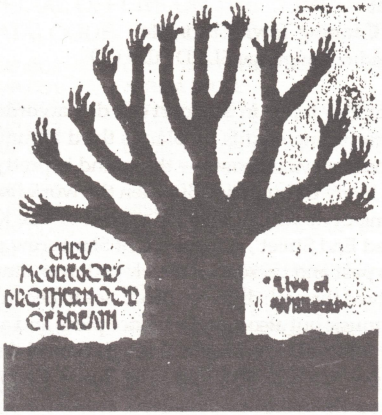
Parker and Coxhill, for whom melody is arrived at from more oblique angles, hit the album's highpoint: a 23-minute duet of staggering attunement to each other's idiosyncrasies. The mutual give-and-take is a joy to hear: there is always space for Coxhill's pinched, swooping melodies or Parker's hard-edged circumrotations. On 'Broad Brush' there are no supporting roles but a sublimely maintained interdependence of technique, emotion and direction. Individual liberties are taken and then justified in the context of the other's response. Pure gold.
Chris Blackford

Slant
The Canning Town Chronicle
Sound & Language SLCD 0020 CD

What they taped in best part of a day according to the recording credits on Slant's third album, and in some ways it shows — the sound is pretty taut and lively throughout. But then the work itself — a song cycle which, save for a cover of The Kinks' 'Dead End Street', is the work of Slant crew members past and present — developed over time and evolved through different processes to become not just music but also a performance piece and a book (the latter also available through Sound & Language). On CD **The Canning Town Chronicle** wraps its urban impressions around a mix of songform and avantists slants; it's probably the smoothest mix Slant has ever devised, moving from folk-style skits, both airy and coarse, to ambient soundscapes where Fourth World muses and trance-dance elements merge almost seamlessly. The idea of supplementing the core trio of performance artist cris cheek, ex-Kahondo Style violinist and vocalist Sianed Jones and turntable manipulator/post concrète sonic doctor Phil Jeck with various guests (guitarist John Wilkinson and drummer Nic Murcott appear here) has effectively brought Slant the best of both worlds: a singular aesthetic and a fulsome variety of attack. Recommended. *(Sound & Language, 85 London Road South, Lowestoft, Suffolk NR33 OAS, England)*
David Ilic

Sylvia Hallett
Let's Fall Out
Mash CD 003-2CD

Sylvia Hallet's first release on Mash, **Skimming**, was a beguiling collection of songs and instrumental pieces, full of intriguing moods and textures. Her newest displays similar variety (again including theatre and dance commissions), but with greater emphasis on her songwriting and singing. I have to confess I found this disc less rewarding, too melancholy in its overall effect, but there's still much to appreciate. Sue Ferrar contributes some violin, otherwise all violin and voice (along with keyboards, hurdy-gurdy, accordion and trombone) are Hallett's. The opening 'Bottled Visions' is



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trippy, almost dub-like; the closing 'Chopin's Mother' starts inside the piano before a mournful melody on the keyboard. In between come short vocal or vocal/violin pieces, plus 'One More Holiday' (the most 'conventional' song on display) and longer theatre pieces. Of these, 'Sweet House' is a dirge, special effects prominent, before trombone interjects a Weill-like melody; 'Fall In To Fall Out' incorporates a duo improvisation, builds with an unsettling drone and is resolved by a string melody; 'Spoilt For Choice' is an accordion tune that never really develops. Overall, a few more chances to glimpse into other lives, and worth the effort.

Gerard F Tierney

Matching Mole
BBC Radio 1 Live In Concert
Windsong WINCD063 CD

Van der Graaf Generator
Maida Vale/The Radio 1 Sessions
Band Of Joy BOJCD008 CD

Come here, kids, Grandpa will tell you about an era when 'real time playing' was still called 'playing'. Live groups did not have an army of hard disks hidden under the stage, and drummers didn't trigger samples from pads. Sometimes groups even played (gasp!) in odd time signatures. And there was no MTV!

Matching Mole, a fine short-lived quartet, 1971-72. Agile, distorted guitar (Phil Miller), 'ugly' treated electric piano (Dave McRae — it's their second line-up), fine bass (Bill MacCormick), good vocal melodies (underfeatured here) by the man who also sat at the drums: Robert Wyatt. Listen how he drives the group from behind; his snare drum had a million ways of going *trr-trr* instead of the boring *ka-bang* you hear nowadays. At times he reminded you of Art Blakey, but he had his own concept. I'd recommend you get their two studio albums — **Matching Mole** and **Matching Mole's Little Red Record** — first, but these 25 live minutes are pretty intense.

Intense was also the name of the game for Van der Graaf. These are 'extended songs', well sung, well played, even adventurous; sometimes they missed the mark, but never for want of trying. Here we have the only official live release by their 'classic' line-up — Banton/Evans/Hammill/Jackson. Two songs from way back ('Darkness' and 'Man-Erg') plus six tracks from their second time together, 1975-76 ('The Undercover Man', 'Sleepwalkers', 'Still Life', 'La Rossa', 'When She Comes' and 'Masks'). It's still hair-raising at times: 'Still Life' will peel you like a grape. No long solos here; listen how the organ drawbars are subtly manipulated — everything at the service of the song. And watch out for a subsequent release of Peter Hammill's solo sessions for the BBC.

Giuseppe Colli

Barry Guy/London Jazz Composers' Orchestra
Portraits
Intakt CD 035 2CD

Few improvisors have taken up the challenge of mining the huge resources of the jazz orchestra with the same kind of sophistication that Barry Guy has shown in the last couple of decades. Recordings such as **Ode**, **Zurich Concerts**, **Stringer**, **Harmos**, **Double Trouble** and **Theoria** have forged a successful bond between the usually separate worlds of free improvisation and the classical avant-garde.

Portraits, a vast work (8 Parts, 6 Subsections) lasting nearly two hours, is in many ways Guy's tribute to his virtuoso LJCO pals who have remained pretty much the same crowd over the years. The work's pre-planned (by Guy) framework allows everybody to make solo and small group contributions, which are seamlessly woven into its expansive fabric, thus avoiding any structural predictability in the movement from individual to collective activity. For those who can follow these things, there's a diagram outlining the flow of events and personalities: early on Wachsmann's violin putting the gilt edge to the easy elegance of Rutherford's trombone; Parker's fiery Catherine-wheel of soprano lines sparking into an oncoming rush of brass and percussion; Malfatti and Phillips' supple and spacious duo with rapier thrusts from the reeds section. A few moments from a procession of marvellous encounters. And the LJCO swings high, too, ejecting impassioned solos from its syncopated rhythmic core in the big finale. You won't hear a finer, more in-

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novative orchestra than the LJCO anywhere in the world.
Chris Blackford

Mujician
Poem About The Hero
Cuneiform Rune 62 CD

Firstly, let's clear up any lingering confusion. 'Mujician' was (used in) the title of three fine Keith Tippett solo recordings on FMP (The word is an amalgam of 'magician' and 'musician', coined by Tippett's daughter). The Mujician present here is a four-piece improvising band formed in 1988, notionally led by Tippett, with Paul Dunmall on saxes, Paul Rogers on 5-string double bass and Tony Levin on drums.

This, their second album, was recorded before a small invited audience, resulting in a live, spontaneous feel without intrusive audience noises. The music consists of five 'verses' of a 'poem' (This does not mean there is any recitation; the only poetry here is musical). The verses vary in length from a minute and a half to over half an hour. There is no obvious narrative structure linking the verses: this is no concept album.

All four players are vastly experienced improvisors. Their collective interplay often makes it difficult to separate out who is doing what. So, 'First Verse' slowly develops into a swirling mass of sound, created by all four, from which it is possible to occasionally identify an individual statement. Then, Dunmall's sax comes through loud, clear and strong with a squally tone. Fans of Dunmall's work with Spirit Level, Danny Thompson's Whatever or Elton Dean's group, will not be disappointed. His energy and invention are awesome. Yet to single him out seems wrong, as the same is true of the other three players. This is a collective triumph.
John Eyles

Network
Volume One: 55 Music Miniatures
Discus 3CD CD

Martin Archer's Network project finally comes to fruition. The brief given to composers/improvisors was to keep their creativity to approximately 90 seconds. A broad range of genres is on offer: classical, dance, avant-garde, improv, electronic/ambient, jazz, noise, pop, etc. In other words there's something here to satisfy most cravings. Lots of new calling cards (to me, anyway): among the interesting ones are Tonino Miano, Glen Capra, Nicky Heinen, Ian Harris, Siwula/Lang. A suspect few, bearing grim electronics clichés, sneak over the quality threshold (no names, no pack drill), but established folk like Alfred 23 Harth, Simon H Fell, Mick Beck, Richard Leigh, Chris Bywater, Primates, Alquimia, bring home the bacon. Compiler/editor, Martin Archer, is to be applauded for giving overall structure and flow to so many disparate elements. The start of an important project and the chance to make some useful contacts.
Chris Blackford

Emily Bezar
Grandmother's Tea Leaves
Olio Records ORC599 CD

Liking songs has gotten a bit risky these days: we mostly get stock chord progressions, inane lyrics, singalong choruses, bicycle pump vocalists. Then, of course, there's rap. Nostalgia, anyone?

Fortunately, we also have Emily Bezar's debut CD: a fine, rare example of a fascinating, captivating, mature musical vision; ten songs/instrumentals she has written, produced and partially engineered. It's easy, at first, to overstate her influences; that voice, that piano reminded this listener of the naked honesty of Joni Mitchell's **Blue**; but the intricate fabric of her melodies, the electronic splashes of colour, the fluid multi-layered contrapuntal quality of her arrangements show Emily Bezar to be her own woman, and an artist of today.

It's mostly a solo affair (the main exception being the fine string quartet of the title-track) but boredom is banished. Her compositional/poetic skills offer depth and variety; the 11-minute long 'Just Like Orestes' never falters under the weight of its ambitions. The short tracks are gems. Bizarre? Not at all. Original? Definitely. Wouldn't it be nice to have fine songs on the radio for a change?
(Olio Records, P.O. Box 5899-182, Berkeley, CA 94705, USA.) **R**
Giuseppe Colli

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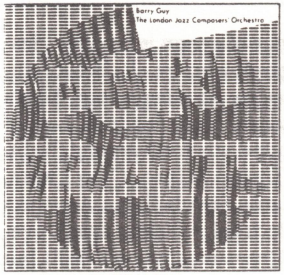
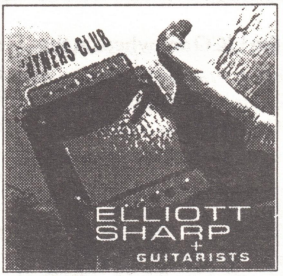


Barry Guy & London Jazz Composers' Orchestra

Portraits

Evan Parker, Trevor Watts, Paul Rutherford, Alan Tomlinson, Simon Picard, Phil Wachsmann, Barre Phillips, & others

Intakt Double CD 035 (2 CD)

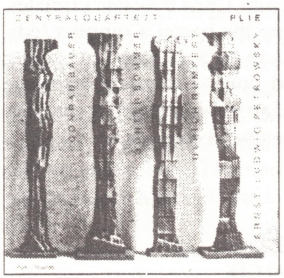


Elliott Sharp

'Dyners Club

Elliott Sharp: Guitar
Roger Kleier: Guitar
David Mecionis: Guitar
John Myers: Guitar

Intakt CD 036



Zentralquartett

Plié

Conrad Bauer: Trombone
Ernst-Ludwig Petrowsky: Saxophone
Ulrich Gumpert: Piano
Günter Sommer. Drums

Intakt CD 037

Jon Rose

Violin Music In The Age Of Shopping

Jon Rose: Violin
Shelley Hirsch: Voice
Otomo Yoshihide: Tapes
Chris Cutler: Drums

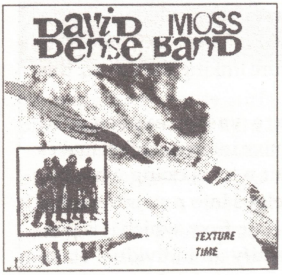
Intakt CD 038

Les Diaboliques

Les Diaboliques

Irène Schweizer: Piano
Maggie Nicols: Voice
Joëlle Léandre: Bass

Intakt CD 030



David Moss Dense Band

Texture Time

David Moss: Voice, Drums, Electronics
John King: Guitar
Jean Chaine: Bass
Anthony Coleman: Keyboards, Sampling Keyboards

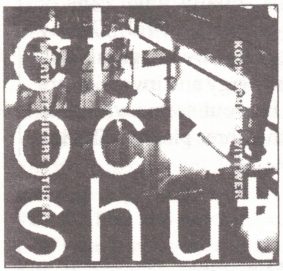
Intakt CD 028

Slawterhaus

Monumental

Johannes Bauer: Trombone,
Dietmar Diesner: Saxophone
Peter Hollinger: Drums
Jon Rose: Violine, Electronics

Intakt CD 030



Chockshut

Chockshut

Hans Koch: Tenor- & Sopransaxophone, Bass-Clarinet
Martin Schütz: El. 5-String Cello
Fredy Studer: Drums
Jacques Demierre: Piano
Andreas Marti, Trombone
Stephan Wittwer, Guitar

Intakt CD 031

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ShortCuts

Reviewed by
Chris Blackford

Erhard Hirt *Gute Und Schlechte Zeiten* (FMP/OWN-90003 CD) The still under-recognised German guitarist Erhard Hirt (born 1951) came to improv via rock, blues and free jazz. Since the late 70s he's been specialising in improv, co-founding the King Übü Orchestrü in 1984: UK listeners might also have heard him in the as yet unrecorded trio with Phil Minton and John Butcher.

This collection of 18 short improvisations for solo electric guitar and guitar synthesizer provides an ideal introduction to Hirt's unusual soundworld. The appropriately titled 'Drone' sets up a static bass drone which is then embellished by a mesh of guitar synthesizer lines. The strangely beautiful, chiming quality of 'Slow Music' with its unpredictable pitch wavering and distortion is reminiscent of Hans Reichel's work; 'Klapp & Flap' uses synthesized percussive effects, and 'Flute' (you guessed it) counterpoints flute sounds with sharply plucked strings. Concise, sometimes embryonic, always bursting with unclassifiable inventiveness. *(FMP distributed by Cadillac — Tel: 071 278 7391)*

Koch/Schütz/Studer/Demierre/Marti/Wittwer *Chockshut* (Intakt CD 031 CD) There's an increasing amount of genre referencing and cross-referencing forcing its way into improvised music these days, and much of it is pretty crass and has more to do with fashion than music. You can't say that of Hans Koch (saxes and clarinet) and Martin Schütz's (el. cello) all-star Swiss six-piece Chockshut, which manages all the idiomatic leaps and shuffles with an amazing dexterity that makes perfect musical sense, too. They're especially adept at working through detailed spiky improv, then suddenly locking on to some sort of catchy groove: on 'Lucky Can' it's Weill-like cabaret; on '5779' and 'Around Seven Corners' it's heavy jazz-rock and heavy jazz-funk with the excellent Stephan Wittwer (check out his solo **World Of Strings** on Intakt, too) doing his nut on electric guitar, propelled by stalwart percussionist Fredy Studer. Finding out how they get back to the improv again is another good reason for snapping up **Chockshut**.

Metall-Assemblague *Jazzcore Meets The Freestyle-School* (Metall 14 CD) The album title wears its heart on its sleeve somewhat, but is indicative of the collision of genres you can expect to hear from this German five-piece. Heavy metal/thrash was one of the surprisingly successful (if rather milked) recruits to improv during the 80s — groups like Last Exit and Slawterhaus have achieved some of the most interesting results, and Metall-Assemblague sometimes remind me of the latter. The first two tracks are particularly aggressive with drummer Robert Gerlach as much a Cozy Powell as a Peter Hollinger; guitarists Josef Suchy and Oliver Steffan scar and scuff up the textures. These elements are maintained for 'Skivy Love' but crossed with a balladic jazz influence coming from sax and trombone. Thereafter it's usually the battle between these forces that produces the direct, driving improvisation. Later pieces effectively contrast fast rhythm tracks with an almost languorous melodic approach. Well worth making their acquaintance. *(contact: Robert Gerlach, Dieselstrasse 7, 96 052 Bamberg, Germany)*

Howard Riley & Keith Tippett *The Bern Concert* (Future Music FMR CD08-071994 CD) The British piano duo of Howard Riley and Keith Tippett has been running since the late 70s and has already come up with two fine albums: **First Encounter** (Impetus) and **In Focus** (Affinity). This third album comprises one hour-long improvisation titled 'Interchange', recorded before an audience for Swiss Radio in December 1993. Sound-wise, it's familiar ground — Riley's occasional Monk-like intervals, Tippett's characteristic cyclical right-hand flourishes and fascination with the muted sounds produced by tiny woodblocks. But it's the remarkable emotional subtlety and unity between the pianists that's important here, arising from their intimate knowledge of each other's styles, which on this occasion complement rather than markedly contrast with one another. There's no treading water, waiting for the next flash of inspiration, the piece unfolds with a craftsman-like precision that

attests to their stamina and predilection for this type of extended improvisation (Tippett, especially, has recorded many of his long solo improvisations). And it's this unity of purpose, exhibited with such clarity on **The Bern Concert**, that takes the improvised piano duet to fresh heights of expressiveness.

B-Shops For The Poor *The Wild Goose Chase* (No Wave CDNW 005 CD) Album number four from the B-Shops is another tense affair — a trio of tightly grouped, well-drilled saxes underscored by Jon Dobie's fiercely inventive guitar and throbbing double bass playing of John Edwards. Music credits again go to tenorist and drum machinist David Petts. The lyrics (a bit of a departure here) are by usual scribe Louise Petts (also an altoist with Adrian Northover) but this time based on *The Wild Goose Chase* a 1937 novel by Rex Warner. So, it's a kind of concept-piece, and Louise, who's not known for vocal histrionics, does inject noticeably more overt emotional presence into her delivery of these songs ('A Parallel State' and 'Mathematician', for example): and the songs feel better for it, too. The B-Shops' sound is by now instantly recognisable; each album a further refinement using a familiar palette of tone-colours. Neither rock nor jazz really, they're actually a group of fine improvisors who have found a way of tailoring the freedom that that implies to suit the 'constraints' of song structure. A significant achievement. Beneath their stern exterior these songs are alive with

B-Shops For The Poor

impassioned improvising which requires your close attention. It's high time B-Shops did some more gigs in the UK! *(No Wave, P.O. Box 796, London SE20 7UD)*

Manuel M. Moto *Manual M. Moto* (Ilinx Records objmm 001 CD) This debut CD release from Portuguese guitarist Manual Moto is a maxi-single lasting just over 21 minutes, featuring one improvised piece for solo acoustic guitar. In the early stages he bows the instrument like a cellist, creating an abrasive, plangent drone. The sounds thin out and elasticate with the dry, rusty resonance of an Indian sarangi. Later on he experiments with note bending and percussive effects, always searching for the unexpected delights of indefinite pitch and scabrous timbres. If the squeal of fingernails across a blackboard excites you, so too will this album. It's the first I've heard of Manuel Moto, and I'd like to hear more. *(contact: Manuel M. Moto, Av. do Uruguai, no. 34-5 A, 1500 Lisboa, Portugal.)*

Ascension *Five Titles* (Shock SX026 CD) Titled numerically, from 7 - 11, these five improvisations by electric guitarist Stefan Jaworzyn and drummer Tony Irving are among the most ferocious I've ever heard from British musicians. Jaworzyn's lacerating guitar lines are matched by Irving's waves of percussive turbulence. The sheer fuck-you ebullience of this duo does have its appeal, I must say, and closer inspection reveals more intricacy and interplay than immediately assaults the ear. Like Americans Elliott Sharp and Buckethead, Jaworzyn is capable of producing interesting textural detail at high velocity and high decibels.

Invoking heavy metal as an influence here would be pretty simplistic and misleading, since neither guitarist nor drummer is interested in apocalyptic riffing or conventional pulse-based energy. Their concentrated pursuit of an aesthetics of noise is definitely an avant-garde phenomenon, and **Five Titles** will consequently find its audience among new music lovers, especially those with robust eardrums and tolerant neighbours. The relentless nature of this pursuit makes tough demands on the listener. Four of these tracks were appropriately recorded at London's Demolition Club. *(Shock, 56 Beresford Road, Chingford, London E4 6EF)*

Elliott Sharp *'Dyners Club* (Intakt CD 036 CD) This is the first time I've heard Elliott Sharp's electric guitar quartet, comprising Roger Kleier, David Mecionis and John Myers. Dense arrangements of Sharp's compositions: layers of what at first sounds like heavily strummed unisons, but after a few hearings you start to become more aware of the subtle pitch relationships in the higher register, of how one or two guitarists will gradually shift into more melodic playing and then return to the ringing staccato rhythms of the piece. Similar kaleidoscopic pattern-making has been created by Robert Fripp and his League of Crafty Guitarists using acoustic guitars. 'Zappin' The Pram', the longest piece at 17 minutes is arguably the most complex and, at times, also the most impressionistic when the separate strands converge in a persistent swirling drone that sounds like an air-raid warning. 'Chomper' celebrates paranoid fuzz; 'Kludge' is like a deranged musical box; while the repetitive patterns of 'Residue' recall passages of Steve Reich's **Electric Counterpoint**. But this is music of an individual character, crisply executed and resonating with all manner of timbral mayhem. Recommended.

Elliott Sharp & Zeena Parkins *Psycho-Acoustic* (Victo cd 026 CD) Recorded at the same Baby Monster Studios in New York only several days after **'Dyners Club**, at the beginning of 1994. For **Psycho-Acoustic** Zeena Parkins supplements her customary

acoustic and electric harps with electronic percussion (check out her wonderful solo debut **Nightmare Alley** on Table Of The Elements), and Elliott Sharp's instrumentation includes dobro, Hawaiian guitar and bass clarinet. That percussive element creates a welcome rhythmic contrast to the often visceral attack of the electric versions of guitar and harp. The five miniatures which comprise 'Imitations Of Life' are for me the highpoint of the album. Like a series of caprices, these improvisations for acoustic harp and dobro (or maybe Hawaiian guitar? Sharp's technique is pretty radical) display a mixture of skittish, whimsical, febrile moods: a tweek of the blues and a flash of something koto-like and oriental. After these the mood darkens once again, the nerve-ends jangle. Traumatic flights of the imagination. Gritty, gripping stuff.

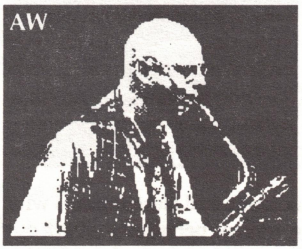
COWWS Quintett *Grooves 'n' Loops* (FMP CD 59 CD) I haven't heard an agreeable, gently persuasive improv album quite like this one all year. Rudiger Carl takes the composing credit for the 16 pieces, which I suppose means that his are the "loops 'n' grooves" and the rest is down to the inspiration of his strong cast of co-improvisors — Irène Schweizer, Phil Wachsmann, Stephan Wittwer and Jay Oliver.

'Die Einführung' is the first of the grooves, set up by Carl's clarinet and Schweizer's piano, and then quickened by Oliver's warm-hearted double bass — a mischievous, jaunty figure that reappears with a different instrumentalist's embellishments each time it nearly gets squashed. Guitarist Wittwer sounds like he's about to lay down one of those twangy soundtracks to a Sergio Leone western, but 'Relativ Ewiges Lied' soon starts to lilt in a Caribbean way towards ska as Carl fans out the melody on accordion. You're just waiting for somebody to sing 'A Message To You Rudy' when the recording's editor steps in prematurely to order a sudden fade. 'Gunst I' offers a solo Wittwer the chance to demonstrate why he's at the forefront of improv's European, eclectic electric guitarists; here he bends, batters, wah-wahs and rips a rock riff to pieces. The string duet, 'Blue Goo', by Wachsmann and Oliver is another well-focused piece to savour, concluding with the viola's despairing tone accompanied by a shuffling, smudgy-textured bass ostinato. Jay Oliver died in Berlin in the late Summer of 1993, several months after these pieces were recorded: they now

stand as a fitting memorial to his talent, and to the generous spirit of adventure that pervades this rewarding album.

Bellatalla/Jenkins/Noble *The Shakedown Club* (Babel BDV9403 CD) 11 smart, not smart-ass, improvisations from the versatile trio of Roberto Bellatalla (double bass), Billy Jenkins (guitar, keys) and Steve Noble (percussion). 'Crazy Dog' is Jenkins in glorious, jangly rockabilly mode, slip-sliding into bluesy licks and making the transitions sound so easy. The group also evokes many ambivalent, abstract atmospheres using small, well-spaced sounds poised between drifting calm and the threshold of nightmare: Noble's shakers, whistles and cymbal rubs, Jenkins' toned-down keyboard (a cross between cheesy stylophone and that ethereal organ playing in Herk Harvey's cult movie **Carnival Of Souls**) and Bellatalla's eerie pointillism. And boy, can they rockout, too! 'Flathead Social Dance' comes remarkably close to the fractured guitar fuzz of Fripp's King Crimson, with Noble driving the heavily accented tempi with bags of Brufordesque *brio*. Irony, parody, hyperbole, and the nostalgic beauty of revved-up Scalextric cars — it's all here. Lovely.

Alan Wilkinson *Seedy Boy* (Bruce's Fingers BFC 45 MC) Saxophonist Alan Wilkinson is best known for his role in the British improv trio Hession/Wilkinson/Fell where his explosive playing has gained him quite a reputation. Solo work (and this album is his solo debut) is a wholly different proposition, however. Where, in the trio, Hession and Fell are wont to supply the necessary impetus for his gigantic leaps, the unaccompanied solos on **Seedy Boy** of course require self-generating and self-sustaining creativity. Wilkinson is magnificent when



big gestures and blazing colours are called for, but less resourceful when the mood turns quiet and the search is for softer shades.

The opening 'Coming Out' is Wilkinson testing the alto's upper limit, leaping from rotund mid-range to howling, piercing cries that virtually dissipate under their own intensity. Likewise, his use of the baritone is remarkably powerful. On 'G-Force' he gives the sturdy horn the full blunderbuss treatment, showering the audience with a hail of split tones; mid-way he circumnavigates in a more thematic jazz-influenced vein, eventually leading to a surprisingly formal coda. Alan Wilkinson also has a boisterous sense of humour which crops up to good effect from time to time. His vocal improvisations are pretty darn weird. Consult a throat specialist before you try this at home.

Günter Christmann & Paul Lovens *In Actu* (Po Torch PTR/JWD 22 LP) Now here's a good reason to get that old turntable down from the attic. German improv giants Lovens (percussion) and Christmann (trombone, cello) in a 1992 mixed media collaboration with visual artists KHR Sonderborg and Wolfgang Hannen, whose canvases were amplified by contact microphones for the occasion (I seem to remember Conspiracy and Gina Southgate doing something like this in London).

Lovens says he sensed a different sort of atmosphere between himself and Christmann, attributable to Sonderborg's presence; in fact, I can't recall ever hearing Lovens playing this sparsely for this length of time: 'The Blessed Dash 1 - 8' is 30 minutes of inventive cello and delightfully understated trombone wheezing and chordal sighs, with Lovens' occasional eruptions, but mostly crisply executed non-rhythmic gestures aware of the surrounding space, sometimes as refined as a horsehair bow delicately drawn across a cymbal. Side Two features Christmann on cello (sharp, grainy, fragmentary) in dialogue with the scratchy musicality of Hannen's nib. Some of the abstract artwork produced is impressively presented on the appropriately large gatefold sleeve. Sonderborg's contribution is spectacularly grotesque. *(Po Torch Records, P.O. Box 1005, D-52001 Aachen, Germany)*

Machine For Making Sense *On Second Thoughts* (Tall Poppies TP034 CD) A dense text-based

work from this Anglo-Australian improvising five-piece: Jim Denley, Chris Mann, Rik Rue, Amanda Stewart and English member Stevie Wishart. The aforementioned text (printed on the sleeve), written by Mann and Stewart (and sometimes delivered with David Moss-like rapidity), is an impossibly complex disquisition on language(s), epistemology and aesthetics: fragmentary, phonetic, surreal, self-parodic, enjoyably ribald, and sometimes bloody ludicrous — e.g. "The parrot that pretends to dream in narrative offers as a portrait of an event the fact Chairs don't think..." Since shuffle-play is a listed suggestion, textual linearity can't be important, and even if it was it wouldn't make things simpler. But difficulty should not be a deterrent to enjoyment: better to relax and let the words canoodle, run rings round each other, or hold each other at knifepoint, all of which they do so effectively.

Musically just as elusive, the flow of ideas is impossible to predict. 26 short tracks (the longest just over five minutes, the shortest 0:0) that wriggle from your eager grasp through concise, abstract exchanges to Rue's found-sounds and sample-collages: Hans Reichel's daxophone and Ikue Mori's drum machine are recognisable ingredients here. This is difficult work, no doubt about it, but to hear text being stretched with such imagination to meet the challenge of the most demanding improv, makes this challenge well worth meeting. *(Tall Poppies available from These — Tel: 071 622 8834)*

Jeff Song & Matt Turner *in vivo* (Asian ImprovAIR 0016 CD) Jeff Song and Matt Turner are an American duo currently making strong connections between improv, ethnic and contemporary classical genres: what emerges is an elegant chamber music which at its best is more than the sum of its parts. **in vivo** sees a few instrumental additions since the duo's auspicious debut **Love & Fear** (O.O. Discs, 1992): Song has added bass guitar to vocals and kayagum (Korean zither), while Turner now plays piano as well as cello. There are also guest appearances from John Mettam (percussion) and Dean Laabs (trumpet). 'Bait' sees the bass in action laying down a rather too upfront funky rhythm track for my liking, which tends to dictate the flow of the piece; its use is more interesting on *'in vivo'* where it's fuzzed up and distorted. By far the most arresting pieces are those for kayagum, cello and understated percussion, where Turner's bittersweet, classical lyricism provides a moving contrast to the kayagum's earthier timbres. 'Chejudo Lament' is rather special. *(Asian Improv Records, 1433 Grant St., Berkeley, CA 94703-1109, USA)*

Turner & Song

Jeffrey Morgan & Joker Nies *Pair 'A' Dice* (MC) Köln-based, American alto saxophonist Jeffrey Morgan has been involved in improvised music since the mid-70s. He's especially persuasive in the instrument's high register where his control of overtones has a marvellous forward-moving urgency; not power-blowing exactly but a considered intensity. His German duo partner, Joker Nies, uses MIDI processing to send out squiggles, clipped phrases and atmospheric clusters of sounds in a most capricious way that takes a bit of getting used to (reminiscent of synth player Dennis Palmer of the Shaking Ray Levis, in this respect). Close attention will be rewarded. *(contact: Jeffrey Morgan, Lübeckerstr. 15, 50668 Köln, Germany)*

Barry Guy and the NOW Orchestra *Study/Witch Gong Game II/10* (Maya MCD9402 CD) Two more substantial works from the prodigous talent of Barry Guy, featuring the NOW (New Orchestra Workshop) Orchestra, a Canadian answer to the LJCO, perhaps. **Study** at 16 minutes opens with a brief section for solo (possibly two) double bass, later swelled by the full orchestra's thickly textured, organising drone. Then follows a sequence of impressively staged crescendos, where the *fortissimos* are breathtakingly sustained. Separate instrumental lines emerge and then return to a central concentration of energy. After the final climax, the *diminuendo* re-

stores that initial drone-like calm. In the desire for this type of resolution one still senses a kind of romanticism, but one that's tested almost to destruction.

Witch Gong Game II/10 is the third in a series of works inspired by the paintings of Scottish artist Alan Davie. At 52 minutes it's another massive Guy work which brilliantly integrates notated and improvised elements. Its polystylistic complexity (atonal composition, big band jazz and free improvisation) and awesome contrapuntal energy are the true successors to those stunning orchestral works of Charles Ives. And like Ives' work, Barry Guy's also fires the imagination and communicates directly to the heart with its breadth of mood and dynamics. The two pieces here, magnificently performed by the composer and the members of NOW Orchestra, will leave you emotionally drained.

Full Monte *Spark In The Dark* (Slam CD 209 CD) Debut album from this British quartet. Seven improvisations that sometimes get close to fusion but wriggle away across more interesting terrain. Chris Biscoe's saxes and clarinet are richly melodic, boppish, at times lead from the front with a rising intensity into abstraction; bassist Marcio Mattos provides his usual undersung, robust textural activity, never content to merely run through routine rhythm section duties. Brian Godding's guitar synth is on the problematic side, its lush, fusion-like chords tending to overdetermine the complexion of some phases. Tony Marsh is brilliant throughout, never over-emphasizing tempo and quick to use cymbals and snare to expand the sound field. Their experience shines through.

Peter Hammill *Roaring Forties* (Fie! 9107 CD) PH's most ambitious album since the opera **Usher**. At 20 minutes 'A Headlong Stretch' is a major composition: polyrhythmic, melodic. No other rock vocalist equals Hammill's expressive range.

U Totem *Strange Attractors* (Cuneiform Rune 66 CD) An amalgamation of 5UU's and Motor Totemist Guild personnel. Music/lyrics based on James Grigsby's novella. Brilliantly crafted compositions. Few other groups stretch the rock form with their sophistication.

Tony Moore *Observations* (Matchless MRCD22 CD) 16 solo improvisations for cello. A seamless exploration of the instrument's melodic, rhythmic and percussive characteristics. Listen in short spells to appreciate the remarkable subtlety of his inventiveness. *(Matchless Recordings, 2 Shetlocks Cottages, Matching Tye, nr. Harlow, Essex CM17 OQR, England)*

Three new cassette releases from London's Polar Bear label. **Adam Bohman's** *Solo* (Polar B6) is uncompromisingly austere, post-Cage improv. Bristling with the strange timbres that Bohman is renowned for. **Mark Browne's** *The Bathos* (Polar B7) features solo improv for alto and soprano saxes, very much in tune with their outdoor locations. Still an under-recognised British voice. **Conspiracy's** third album *Gorilla* (Polar B3) adds guest percussionist Mark Sanders in their indomitable quest for communion in the textural landscape of abstraction. Essential. *(Polar Bear Recordings, 10 Century Road, Walthamstow, London E17 6JB)*

Furt *Sink* (VNTG19 MC); **The Institution of Rot, June 1993** (VNTG21 MC) Powerful sampling-electroacoustic-noise-industrial improv from Furt. The other is the soundtrack to an extraordinary visual/aural installation by Furt plus Bohman and Nick Couldry, and visual artist Crow. A video is also available. *(Vintage Productions, 109 Corbyn Street, London N4 3BX)*

King Crimson *VROOOM* (Discipline Global Mobile DGM 0004 CD) Fripp, Bruford, Belew, Levin, plus Trey Gunn and Pat Mastelotto. Dense and visceral progressive rock from masters of the genre. 30-minute mini-album, but much to shout about. Welcome back KC!

Tim Hodgkinson *Each In Our Own Thoughts* (Woof 016/Megaphone 014 CD) TH's solo debut, comprising a range of composing styles: a short Bartokian string quartet, sampling and sequencing pieces, songs. With help from Dagmar Krause, Chris Cutler, Lindsay Cooper, Bill Gilonis and others. This is Tim Hodgkinson's most advanced work; his disciplined eclecticism gives postmodernism a good name. *(distributed by RéR)* **R**

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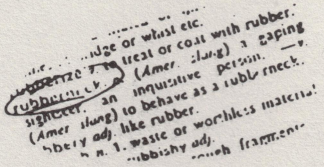
fiction issue

If you would like your previously unpublished **'experimental fiction'** to be considered for publication in the second **Fiction Issue**, please send it to the usual address. Upper limit for pieces is 1500 words approx. Please do not expect payment for published work. The budget is too nailbiting!



. . . short ideas repeated
Massage the brain . . .
Robert Ashley, 1979